

## THE GOVERNMENT'S ROLE IN EMPOWERING FARMER GROUPS IN KUTA BARU VILLAGE, TEBING TINGGI DISTRICT, SERDANG BEDAGAI REGENCY

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### Article History

Received: 22 October 2024  
Accepted: 4 November 2024  
Published: 12 December 2024

### Abstract

This study aims to describe the role of the government in empowering farmer groups in Kuta Baru Village, Tebing Tinggi Subdistrict, Serdang Bedagai Regency. The objective of this research is to understand the government's role in empowering farmer groups in Kuta Baru Village. The research adopts a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, and data were obtained through interviews with research informants and direct observation in Kuta Baru Village, Tebing Tinggi Subdistrict, Serdang Bedagai Regency. The data is supported by documentation evidence and relevant documents available at the Kuta Baru Village Office. The data analysis process in this study involves data reduction, data presentation, drawing conclusions, and verification. The findings indicate that the government's role in empowering farmer groups in Kuta Baru Village is not yet optimal. This is due to a lack of government attention to the farmer groups, insufficient active involvement by the government to address the challenges faced by the groups—such as funding issues, agricultural facilities, and infrastructure and the uneven distribution of aid. Moreover, much of the aid, such as plant seeds, is unsuitable for plantin.

**Keywords:** Empowerment, Farmer groups, The role of the government

### A. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is endowed with vast natural wealth and abundant natural resources. Given these natural conditions, the majority of Indonesia's population relies on farming as their primary livelihood. The country's fertile lands provide significant potential to create opportunities for its citizens to engage in agriculture, enabling the agricultural sector to contribute to community economic efforts. In rural areas, there is still a substantial human resource pool skilled in agriculture, as farming remains the main employment avenue for rural communities. The government's awareness of the potential of human resources (HR) and natural resources (NR), which have yet to be fully developed and utilized by farmers, emphasizes the need for empowering farmer groups to support physical progress and agricultural development. The government, as the primary executor of state functions, plays a crucial role in ensuring the success of development processes, including human resource development, infrastructure, and other forms of advancement.

The main idea of empowerment involves enhancing the ability of individuals or groups to influence people to act, irrespective of their own goals and interests (Suharto, 2017). The empowerment of communities, particularly rice farmers in Kuta Baru Village, should receive

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more serious, well-planned, sustainable, and expedited attention. Empowering communities is one of the primary duties of the government and its institutions. Local government officials, in particular, are consistently required to take significant roles in empowering the communities within their jurisdiction. Nearly 80% of the residents of Kuta Baru Village depend on rice farming for their livelihood. However, the high costs of subsidized fertilizers and pesticides for rice cultivation contrast sharply with the unstable price of rice. Consequently, farmers have taken alternative measures by utilizing their farmland to grow other crops such as shallots, long beans, cucumbers, red chilies, corn, and others. These efforts aim to maintain food security for residents of Kuta Baru Village. The importance of farmer institutions, which have been recognized in agricultural development in both industrialized and developing countries like Indonesia, cannot be overstated. These institutions are expected to assist farmers in overcoming economic crises, particularly in Kuta Baru Village. However, their functions have not yet been fully optimized.



Figure 1. Farmers are harvesting rice.  
Source: Researcher's Documentation

The issues faced by farmer groups in Kuta Baru Village are also evident from the lack of active engagement by Field Agricultural Extension Officers (PPL), who are tasked by the agricultural department to assist farmers. These officers are expected to guide farmers through outreach, training, and education programs aimed at empowering the farming community in collaboration with agricultural extension workers and the Kuta Baru Village government.

Farmers in Kuta Baru Village hope to improve their quality of life through empowerment and human resource development, including training programs and efforts to enhance their livelihoods. Observing the conditions of farmers in Kuta Baru Village, Tebing Tinggi Subdistrict, the researcher concludes that the above-mentioned issues have become an openly discussed topic. The lack of government involvement in the area has become a common problem for the farming community.

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From the perspective of the agricultural era, particularly for farmer groups in Kuta Baru Village, the vast agricultural land available remains underutilized and fails to meet the intended targets for success, prosperity, and the well-being of farmers in the village.



Figure 2. Rice harvested by farmers  
Source: Researcher's Documentation

## B. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Theresia (2015), the government is a continuous and synergistic process of activities aimed at encouraging all existing potentials to act evolutionarily through the involvement of all resources. Community empowerment, in this context, focuses on aspects related to the livelihood of society as a nation, specifically empowerment in the field of farmer groups.

Conceptually, empowerment originates from the word "power," which means authority or capability. Thus, the fundamental concept of empowerment is directly linked to the concept of power. Power becomes an object inherently tied to the ability to exercise authority so that others can perform actions desired by the authority, even if those actions go against their own personal desires (Suharto, 2014).

Siagian (2009) also stated that the government plays a very important role in the process of national development. Hence, there are several key roles of the government that serve as the main benchmarks, as follows:

- a. The government's role as a stabilizer is to create social balance oriented toward maintaining social stability within the community.
- b. The government's role as an innovator involves generating creative and new ideas for development, including innovative methods and approaches introduced by the government itself.
- c. The government as a modernizer functions to guide and encourage society to think progressively and adopt a modern lifestyle. Experiences from various countries show that if the government aims to play a modernizing role, it must first implement modernization within its bureaucracy.
- d. The government as a pioneer means that, in the context of nation-building, the government must take the lead for its people.

- e. The government as an executor signifies that the government is expected to act as a capable executor in various activities.

As a form of the government's role in developing and advancing the country, there needs to be active involvement with the community to develop all the potentials they possess by giving them an active role. According to Lbolo (2010), there are three fundamental roles of the government related to community development and empowerment as follows:

1. The Government's Role as a Regulator

This means that the government, as the implementer and driver of the community, must set directions to balance the implementation of development in the region by preparing and establishing regulations for the community to ensure effectiveness and orderliness in advancing development.

2. The Government's Role as a Dynamizer

It is an effort by the government to encourage the community to mobilize and actively participate in the development process while maintaining and promoting the dynamics of local development.

3. The Government's Role as a Facilitator

This means that the government can create conducive conditions for development implementers, whose role is to bridge the interests of the government and the community, and vice versa, in optimizing development activities in the area.

The government has now implemented various empowerment programs to enhance community participation in processes, implementation, and monitoring of the empowerment efforts currently carried out by field agricultural extension officers. Government activities are continuous and place the community as the primary actors. The most important aspect of these programs is their aim to foster creativity, self-reliance, and the well-being of the community on an ongoing basis.

### **C. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study is a qualitative research using a descriptive approach. Bodgan and Taylor, as cited in Moleong (2013), define qualitative research as a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from individuals and observable behaviors in occurring phenomena. Therefore, the researcher conducted initial interviews or observations with the Agricultural Office and the relevant community. The qualitative method applied involves direct fieldwork.

The research location is a site related to the research problem's objectives and serves as a source of data for the researcher. This study was conducted in North Sumatra, specifically in Hamlet IV, Kuta Baru Village, Tebing Tinggi Subdistrict, Serdang Bedagai Regency. It focuses on the process of community empowerment implementation, particularly for farmer groups. The empowerment programs for farmers have been conducted; however, there is still a visible lack of tangible government involvement in the community, as well as conditions that do not fully meet expectations and existing regulations on community empowerment.

Research informants are individuals who provide information to the researcher about field facts in qualitative studies. The informants in this study include: Mr. Aspalila Hamdani, SP, as Program Affairs Extension Officer; Mr. Zulfikar, as Field Agricultural Extension Officer; Mrs. Wiranti, as Head of Kuta Baru Village; Mr. Suherman, as Head of the Sentosa Farmer Group; Mr. Bambang, as Head of the Mekar I Farmer Group; Mr. Suriadi, as Head of the Makmur I Farmer Group; Mr. Agus Sudono, as a Member of the Mekar I Farmer Group; Mr. Musa, as a Member of the Makmur I Farmer Group

Data were collected through interviews and document studies. To ensure data validity, the researcher used the source triangulation method.

#### **D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The principle of regional autonomy applies the broadest autonomy, meaning that regions are granted the authority to manage and regulate all governmental affairs as stipulated in Law No. 6 of 2014 concerning Villages (Fauzi, 2019). Regions have the authority to formulate regional policies aimed at providing services, enhancing participation, and empowering communities in village governance, which is intended to improve public welfare. In line with this principle, autonomy is implemented responsibly and with integrity (Mina, 2016).

This underscores the importance of the government's role in empowering farming communities. The government is obligated to continuously strive to empower communities with the aim of improving economic and social welfare, enabling farming communities to live independently. According to Evira Ramadayanti et al. (2021), empowerment generally involves shaping and building community welfare and independence to counteract the currents of globalization. Furthermore, the goal of empowerment is to achieve a state of social change where communities are empowered and capable of meeting their physical, economic, and social needs, as well as independently carrying out life's tasks.

To explore the government's role in empowering farmer groups in Kuta Baru Village, Tebing Tinggi Subdistrict, the researcher uses the Government Role Theory with four indicators proposed by Arif (as cited in Nurdin, 2014), namely:

##### **The Role of the Village Government as a Regulator**

The Government's Role as a Regulator involves setting directions to balance the implementation of development through the issuance of regulations. As a regulator, the government provides fundamental guidelines to the community as instruments to manage all activities related to empowerment implementation. The government's role as a regulator means that the government, as the executor and driver of society, must establish directions to balance the execution of development by preparing and setting regulations for the community to enhance effectiveness and orderliness in development and growth. Policies or mechanisms created by the government, whether in the form of policies or other rules, aim to improve the overall welfare of society.

Based on interviews and field observations conducted by the researcher, it was found that regarding regulations/mechanisms and government policies on farmer group empowerment, the researcher concluded that the general community is unaware of clear guidelines to serve as references for empowerment. This is evident from statements provided by community empowerment representatives or field agricultural extension officers (PPL), which indicate that not only the general public lacks understanding of the applicable regulations, but even the PPL, as government representatives tasked with empowerment, are also less familiar with the regulations in force.

Meanwhile, local governments only follow existing regulations on community empowerment as outlined in the Guidelines for Self-Supporting Agricultural Training Institutional Development. This is further refined through derivative regulations, such as Law No. 19 of 2013 of the Republic of Indonesia on the Protection and Empowerment of Farmers, and is further adapted to the specific needs of empowerment in the region through Serdang Bedagai District Regulation No. 15 of 2017 on the Protection and Empowerment of Farmers.

##### **The Role of the Government as a Dynamist**

The government's role as a dynamist is to drive community participation when there are obstacles in the development process, in order to encourage and maintain the dynamics of

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local development. This coaching and guidance are crucial for empowering farming communities, as it is needed to maintain the dynamic role of specific bodies that can provide guidance to the community. The Kuta Baru Village government, in carrying out empowerment, invites the Agricultural Office to provide guidance to the community aimed at improving the quality of farmers. However, not only the Agricultural Office, but also farmer groups organize community development. Unfortunately, the enthusiasm of the Kuta Baru Village community is very low due to constraints such as the lack of land and the fact that most of them work as laborers, so only the farmer groups show significant enthusiasm.

The guidance and training provided to farmer groups include: Socialization, Assistance, Training, and Field Visits. Based on interviews conducted by the researcher with several informants regarding the Dynamist indicator, which includes the sub-indicators (1) socialization, (2) assistance, (3) training, and (4) field visits, it was found that in terms of socialization, it was only occasionally conducted, without a regular schedule, which resulted in a negative impact on the farmer groups. Similarly, the sub-indicators of assistance and training were still considered insufficient and very rarely carried out by the government, leading to a lack of active participation in providing training to the farming community. As for the final sub-indicator, field visits, the research encountered a contradiction in the arguments from both parties involved in this empowerment program. The local government assumed that field visits had been scheduled and carried out regularly, whereas the community reported the opposite, stating that such visits were still lacking.

#### **The Role of the Government as a Facilitator**

The government's role as a facilitator is to create a conducive environment for the implementation of development (bridging the interests of various parties to optimize regional development). As a facilitator, the government strives to create or facilitate an orderly, comfortable, and safe atmosphere, including facilitating the availability of infrastructure and development facilities such as coaching and funding/capital. The government also acts as a driver by supporting through the improvement of education, training, skills, and financing, providing capital according to the needs of the community that seeks to be empowered.

In this case, the local government, particularly the Agricultural Office, provides facilities in the form of assistance to the farming community, such as seeds, fertilizers, and other production tools, for each member of the farmer groups so that they can manage and utilize these resources according to their needs.

Based on the interviews with the informants, it was found that the government's assistance has been fairly well implemented and reached the farming community in Kuta Baru Village. However, some of the government assistance provided to the community was not utilized well by the farmers, and some were even left unused. The reason farmers did not use the assistance was because the aid did not meet their needs, such as seeds that were of poor quality or diseased. As a result, when the seeds were planted, it was essentially a waste of effort, as the yield only reached half of what was expected from the total seeds planted.

Table 1: Infrastructure Assistance for Farmer Group Members of Kuta Baru Village 2024

<i>No</i>	<i>Type of Assistance</i>	<i>facilities</i>	<i>Number of Units</i>	<i>Description</i>
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1	Rice Seed Assitance	Farmer Groups	According to the Needs of the Farmer Groups	Realized
2	Subsidized Fertilizer Assistance	Farmer Groups	1 Ton /Farmer Group	Realized
3	Spraying Equipment Assistance (Tank Machine)	Farmer Groups	7 Units/ Farmer Group	Realized
4	Assistance for Hoe and Samurai Tools	Farmer Group Members	10 Units / Farmer Group	Realized

### E. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research conducted by the researcher regarding the role of the government in the empowerment of farmer groups in Kuta Baru Village, Tebing Tinggi District, Serdang Bedagai Regency, it can be concluded that in the regulatory aspect, particularly regarding the rules or mechanisms of government policies on the empowerment of farmer groups, the community generally does not know about the regulations that bind them for empowerment. As a result, the farmers participate in the empowerment programs merely as participants without being provided with knowledge about the rules and government policies. Meanwhile, in the dynamic aspect, which includes several indicators such as socialization, assistance, training, and field visits, it can be observed that all these indicators lean towards a negative direction. The information obtained by the researcher during interviews with informants identified that the implementation of socialization and assistance is very rarely conducted. Similarly, in the training and field visit indicators, the government's training programs are seldom held, and farmers, who have limited knowledge in managing agriculture to improve their progress, lack sufficient training. The same applies to field visits, which are not carried out optimally due to the rarity of extension workers going directly to the field. In the facilitator aspect, despite the limitations in seeds, fertilizers, and other production tools, the government, as the service provider for the community, has been able to facilitate the farmers well. However, some assistance, such as seeds that are not fertile, reaches the farmers because the distribution process from the central government to the regions is one of the factors causing the issue.

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