



Policy evaluation of rural development and community empowerment based on evidence

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Abstract

This article focuses on the evaluation of rural development and community empowerment policies across Indonesia during the Covid-19 pandemic era. Policy evaluation in this study examines the implementation of evidence-based policies based on Minister of Village Development and Disadvantaged Region Empowerment Regulation No. 21/2020 concerning General Guidelines for Village Development and Rural Community Empowerment. The research method employs a descriptive qualitative approach with Creswell analysis. Policy evaluation indicates that the majority of villages in Indonesia are not yet accustomed to Minister of Village Development and Disadvantaged Region Empowerment Regulation No. 21/2020, thus hindering the implementation of SDGs-based development. Furthermore, community participation in development is not yet apparent, and community empowerment remains suboptimal

Keywords: Public evaluation, rural development, community empowerment, evidence

Introduction

The policy evaluation is grounded in the issuance of Covid-19 mitigation policies, impacting the utilization focus of Village Funds for rural development and community empowerment. The effects of Covid-19 are notably felt, particularly in the agenda of rural development planning and community empowerment, which progresses slowly. On the other hand, there are technical issues regarding the transition of the Village Development Planning Team's organizational structure following the promulgation of Minister of Village Development and Disadvantaged Region Empowerment Regulation No. 21/2020 concerning General Guidelines for Village Development and Rural Community Empowerment. Although normatively the General Guidelines for Village Development and Rural Community Empowerment through Minister of Village Development and Disadvantaged Region Empowerment Regulation No. 21/2020 have been established, some villages still adhere to the village development guidelines stipulated in Minister of Home Affairs Regulation No. 114/2014. Consequently, not all villages adapt the legal mandate that Village Development Plans are drafted by the Village Development Planning Team, appointed by the Village Head, and simultaneously formulate the achievement of SDGs within the planning document.

This transitional phenomenon necessitates corrective actions. One of them is through evidence-based policy actions to formulate options for village development and community empowerment policies. Many developed countries utilize evidence-based policy formulation, as argued by Hasbullah (2018), stating that developed countries become stronger when employing evidence-based development policies. Meanwhile, The Pew Charitable Trusts (2014) asserts that evidence-based policy is more effective in reducing costs, expanding innovative programs, and strengthening accessibility.

The concept of evidence-based policy can indeed be applied in developing countries considering the diversity within them. Sutcliffe and Court (2005) mention that the political conditions in developing countries tend to be unstable, and

many do not guarantee political freedom—despite claiming to be democratic nations. Policies tend to be centralized without considering the interests of their subordinates (regions). However, with the increasing political awareness of the populace, the idea of evidence-based policy can be applied in developing countries. This is because evidence-based policy can serve as a link between necessary research and policy formulation. According to Asmara and Handoyo (2015) ^[1], policies in Indonesia are generally not based on evidence-based research. Most policies in Indonesia stem from unilateral thoughts and intuition held by policymakers. Therefore, this research is aimed at evaluating and providing solutions and/or advocacy for village development and community empowerment policies in the era of Minister of Village Development and Disadvantaged Region Empowerment Regulation No. 21/2020.

Theoretical Foundation

Policy Evaluation

Policy evaluation is aimed at assessing the effectiveness of public policies to be held accountable to their constituents. According to Dunn (1999:608), there are three functions of evaluation, namely: providing valid and reliable information about policy performance; contributing to the clarification and criticism of the values underlying the selection of objectives and targets; and contributing to the application of other policy analysis methods, including problem formulation and recommendations. The criteria for policy evaluation according to Dunn (1999:610) are:

1. **Effectiveness:** Whether the desired outcomes have been achieved?
2. **Efficiency:** How much effort is required to achieve the desired outcomes?
3. **Adequacy:** To what extent does achieving the desired outcomes solve the problem?
4. **Equity:** Are the costs and benefits distributed evenly among different groups?

5. **Responsiveness:** Do the policy outcomes satisfy the needs, preferences, or values of specific groups?
6. **Appropriateness:** Are the desired outcomes truly useful or valuable?

Evidence-Based Policy

Evidence is a modern rational approach that can solve problems by focusing on accurate diagnosis and knowledge of cause-and-effect relationships (Head, 2008 ^[5]; Oliver *et al.*, 2014) ^[9]. The term 'evidence-based policy' emerged in the United Kingdom in 1997, initially advocated by the Prime Minister, Tony Blair (Parson, 2006). Subsequently, Sundari (2007) ^[12] provided three ways to translate evidence into policy: (1) identifying the needs for policy utilization; (2) designing strategies and conducting appropriate and relevant research; and (3) disseminating useful information. Specifically, Turner (2013) ^[15] stated that evidence is required by policymakers to: assist them in diagnosing problems and designing policy options; demonstrate and evaluate the impacts of new initiatives and programs; monitor program implementation, measure costs and performance, and their sensitivity to different settings; as well as evaluate the long-term impacts and cost-effectiveness of existing programs.

Development and Development Planning

Development is an activity akin to research or investigation, employing research methods. In this context, development is based on research, where the outputs of research are subsequently utilized in development planning activities. Development planning involves the process of formulating alternatives or decisions based on data and facts, which serve as the foundation for carrying out a series of societal activities (Riyadi, 2004 ^[11]; Patarai, 2019). According to Wrihatnolo and Riant (2006), the essential elements and cycle of development planning are as follows:

1. Fundamental policies or basic strategies of development plans, often referred to as goals, directions, and development priorities. In this aspect, it is essential to establish the objectives of the plan (development objective/plan objective).
2. The presence of a planning framework indicating the relationship between development variables and their implications.
3. Estimation of the main sources of development financing.
4. Consistent and coherent policies, including fiscal, monetary, budgetary, pricing, sectoral, and regional development policies.
5. Sectoral investment programs such as agriculture, industry, education, health, and others.
6. Administrative structures supportive of development planning and implementation.

Empowerment of Rural Communities

Empowerment of rural communities is an effort to develop self-reliance and welfare by enhancing knowledge, attitudes, skills, behaviors, capabilities, awareness, and utilizing resources through the establishment of policies, programs, activities, and appropriate mentoring tailored to the essence of the issues and priority needs of rural communities (Handini *et al.*, 2019) ^[4]. The Village Government formulates Village Development planning in accordance

with its authority, referring to the development planning of the District/City. Planning and Development in the village are carried out by the Village Government involving the entire rural community with a spirit of mutual cooperation. The rural community has the right to monitor the implementation of Village Development. In the context of village planning and development implementation, the Village Government is assisted by the district/city government, which is technically carried out by the regional government's working units in the district/city. To coordinate village development, the village head may be assisted by professional mentors, village community empowerment cadres, and/or third parties. The Sub-District Head or other relevant authorities will coordinate mentoring activities in their respective areas (Kessa, 2015) ^[8].

Material and Methodology

The research conducted in this study adopts a qualitative research approach, which is descriptive in nature, utilizing policy research focusing on a case study of policy evaluation. The research location encompasses the working areas of the Ministry of Village Development of Underdeveloped and Transmigration Areas, covering all villages in Indonesia. Data collection methods include primary data such as Focus Group Discussions (FGD), surveys, desk studies, and secondary data comprising documents related to policy evaluation of development. Data analysis employs the Creswell model (2009) ^[3], involving the following steps:

1. Preparation of data for analysis, consisting of final evaluation reports of policies in sampled villages.
2. Comprehensive data reading.
3. Preparation of coding processes and further data review.
4. Description of research focus based on the results of coding.

Data Presentation and Analysis

1. Low Community Participation in Village Development and Discrepancies in SDGs Policy Direction in Sustainable Village Development

According to the policy evaluation stakeholders on SDGs Village policies, the SDGs Village program is something new. This statement was expressed by all village and supra-village participants present in focus group discussions (FGDs) and interview processes. Until now, village development planning has been conducted generally and has not been burdened with the direction of SDGs Village policy. Almost all villages in the assessment area are more familiar with Minister of Home Affairs Regulation No. 114/2014 as the standard operating procedure (SOP) for the stages of village development planning rather than the stages of SDGs Village data collection and planning according to Minister of Village Development and Disadvantaged Regions and Transmigration Regulation No. 21/2020.

The Village Development Policy under Minister of Home Affairs Regulation No. 114/2014 relates to the alignment between village development and regional development policy directions. Meanwhile, Minister of Village Development and Disadvantaged Regions and Transmigration Regulation No. 21/2020 is directed towards SDGs Village policies and is required to be in line with regional development policy directions. These differing

policy directions are part of the challenges faced in village development within the 'world of village life'.

In villages in Bangkalan Regency (such as Arok Village, Aeng Tabar Village, Pangpong Village, etc.) in East Java, the results of data collection indicate that the enthusiasm of villagers for internalizing SDGs Village is lacking or insufficiently participatory, especially regarding village development planning aspects. Thus far, village planning matters have been perceived by villagers as the responsibility of the village leadership, namely the Village Head (Klebun). Differences in perceptions regarding the direction of SDGs Village policy also occur in several villages in Wonogiri Regency, Central Java, where they are accustomed to deliberating in village development planning without discussing the 18 SDGs Village goals.

On a larger scale, supra-village governments in Pandeglang, Banten, believe that all village development regulations have recently been determined by the central government, rendering regional autonomy no longer applicable.

Regarding SDGs Village policy, the direction of SDGs Village policy is determined by the central government through the Ministry of Village Development and Disadvantaged Regions and Transmigration after adapting global SDGs issues—although there are differences between categories in SDGs Village and categorization in Global SDGs due to interpretations of village situations. A participant from a village in Deli Serdang, North Sumatra, expressed that the SDGs Village program is not perceived as part of the village, not owned by the village, or more accurately, not within the village's jurisdiction.

Furthermore, villages in South Bangka Regency, Bangka Belitung Islands, have not yet understood the direction of SDGs Village policy related to their authority in managing coastal resources, forests, and tin mines. Villages in Ngada, East Nusa Tenggara, which are strongly tied to their customs, have also not institutionalized the direction of SDGs Village policy within their customary institutions, such as Lokatua Matap.

A unique situation occurs in Bulungan, North Kalimantan, and Banjar, South Kalimantan. Village deliberation regulations are used as a mediator for the dualism of village development regulations in Bulungan, while the direction of SDGs Village policy is affirmed as a discourse of village development—although they have not yet received the results of data collection. The regulatory impact of the direction of SDGs Village policy is strongly felt in Sigi, Central Sulawesi. Participants state that "One Village Development Plan, Two Rules." This statement criticizes the regulations regarding villages—apart from the Village Law—which are perceived to have violated their village's authority.

Furthermore, in villages in Konawe, Southeast Sulawesi, the majority have heard of the SDGs Village program and it has been socialized to the villages. However, concrete forms of SDGs Village policy recommendations have not yet been received/realized. Additionally, there are villages that are still uncertain about the concrete form of SDGs Village policy direction. This uncertainty occurs in villages in West Halmahera, North Maluku, and villages in South Manokwari, West Papua. Both villages are equally unfamiliar with the direction of SDGs Village policy and its relevance to their world/life.

The above findings illustrate the importance of active participation awareness in sustainable development. As

argued by Joshi (2018)^[7] and Tasente and Stan (2023)^[13], the presence of active village community participation—alongside other factors such as budget, leadership, government support—is a key factor that can change and bring about change in the village. This has been evidenced by the progress of Punsari Village in India through active democratic community participation (Joshi, 2018)^[7]. In addition to active community participation, SDGs Village development also requires an increase in the capacity of local government—specifically, the village government.

2. The Challenges of Villages in Community Empowerment Programs During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Participants from Arok Village in Bangkalan, East Java expressed their aspirations regarding a political promise to empower children who are at risk of dropping out of school. However, regressive planning practices have led to a lack of budget allocation for these children. Consequently, the Village Head decided to utilize personal funds to ensure the child could continue their education. Community empowerment initiatives around river areas are hindered by unclear jurisdictional boundaries and communication with the Bangkalan government and central government. Village-Owned Enterprises (BUM Desa) were established with bold intentions but lacked initial funding from the Village Fund, instead relying on some form of village asset utilization. Furthermore, issues regarding salaries for management personnel were left unaddressed.

Village finances are inherently a Local Village-Scale Authority. In Wonogiri, Central Java, villages have actively empowered residents through information technology (Wi-Fi), yet technological advancements coincide with extreme climate change. The village government has allocated funds for water pumps, showcasing a village that serves its residents. However, recurring monkey attacks damaging crops have not been addressed in the Village Budget allocation Plan (APB Desa) as authorities debate whether these incidents classify as disasters. In contrast, regulations addressing air pollution and diaper waste in Kadilimus Village, Pandeglang, Banten, are enforced with moral sanctions within village regulations, indicating a proactive approach.

Similar environmental concerns exist in Deli Serdang, Sumatera Utara, where funding for coastal and agricultural community empowerment programs is required. Mangrove tourism demands substantial funding, while credits for farmers must be carefully managed to prevent exploitation by loan sharks. Village-Owned Enterprises are seen as suitable institutions for managing coastal tourism and providing access to credit for farmers.

In coastal areas like Tukak Village, South Bangka, regulations regarding mangrove forest management need addressing, alongside the need to assert village jurisdiction over mining activities. Programs aimed at community empowerment often face challenges, such as those encountered in Ngada, East Nusa Tenggara, where traditional customs govern long-lasting initiatives focusing on ecological balance, such as forest spring management. Mining areas present significant challenges, as seen in Banjar Village, South Kalimantan, where conflicts arise between illegal mining activities and village interests. Initiatives to combat toxic waste from illegal operations require village-government cooperation to develop local

regulations and provide funds for Village-Owned Enterprises.

Marketplaces are crucial economic hubs in villages, as seen in Konawe Selatan, where the establishment of a village market near the Village Office has the potential to boost local horticultural businesses, mainly run by women. However, the transformation of local water management projects poses organizational challenges. Associations face uncertainty during the transformation process, often resisting regulatory changes. These findings underscore the importance of active community participation in sustainable development, requiring increased capacity building for local governments.

Conclusions

Based on the policy evaluation of SDGs Village development and evidence-based empowerment, it can be concluded that there are still many villages in Indonesia that lack an understanding of the meaning of Minister of Village Regulation number 21 of 2020. Additionally, the low level of active participation by village communities in the development process, dualism of rules, institutions, and so forth are concrete problems that must be addressed by all stakeholders involved. Capacity building is also needed to shape the mindset of village communities and knowledge-based village governments, such as optimizing local knowledge.

Total changes in village development regulations and community empowerment are also necessary to create harmony and alignment with SDGs Village development. Furthermore, advocacy programs and coaching clinics in the form of village development assistance and empowerment need to be enhanced. Lastly, an effective socialization process with simple yet effective language and technical approaches is also required so that the message of sustainable development can be understood by village communities.

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