

Research Article

The Role of Village Government in Economic Empowerment of Local Fishermen : A Study in Mengkait Village, Riau Islands

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Abstract. This study discusses the strategic role of the village government in economic empowerment of local fishermen in Mengkait Village, Anambas Islands, Riau Islands Province. With a descriptive qualitative approach, this study illustrates how village governments facilitate training, fishing gear assistance, and the establishment of economic institutions to improve the welfare of fishermen. The results of the study show that the role of the village government is quite effective, characterized by increasing the capacity of fishermen, the involvement of vulnerable groups, and the participatory involvement of the community in development planning. However, some challenges are still faced, such as dependence on aid and weak financial literacy. These findings show that empowerment carried out in a planned, participatory, and local potential-based manner is able to create significant economic changes in coastal villages. This research is expected to be a policy reference for the empowerment of fishing communities in other 3T regions in Indonesia.

Keywords: Empowerment, Village Government, Local Fishermen, Mengkait Village, Coastal Economy.

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1. Introduction

Indonesia is known as the largest archipelago in the world, with more than 17,000 islands spread from Sabang to Merauke. Its strategic location and the area of the sea area which reaches about two-thirds of the total national area make the marine and fisheries sector one of the important pillars of national development. Fishing communities have a very vital role as economic drivers based on marine resources. However, behind this great potential, the lives of fishermen in various regions are still synonymous with poverty, limited access, and socio-economic vulnerability (Berutu et al., 2024). Traditional fishermen generally still depend on simple fishing methods, without adequate technological support and market access. Classic problems such as fluctuations in fish prices, extreme weather, and limited capital and access to information are obstacles that continue to overshadow them (Purnaningtyas, Syamsiyah and Wardani, 2023). Mengkait Village is located in South Siantan District, Anambas Islands Regency, Riau Islands Province, is an example of a coastal area where the majority of the population works as fishermen. Its location in the outermost areas and borders, as well as remote from major economic centers, makes the development challenges in this village very complex. Limited infrastructure, logistics, and access to public services are problems that have not been fully resolved (Hastuti et al., 2023). The village government has an important role as the local actor who is closest to the community. With the authority and village funds provided through the decentralization

policy, the village government has a great opportunity to become the driving force for the economic empowerment of the community, especially local fishermen. This role is not only administrative, but also strategic in designing and implementing programs based on the real needs of the community (Musyawarah and Idayanti, 2022).

The economic empowerment of local fishermen must be seen as an integral part of village development based on local potential. This includes aspects of improving fishermen's skills, diversifying livelihoods, providing fisheries supporting infrastructure, and opening access to markets and business capital (Al Asy'ary and Sundari, 2022). The village government, through village development planning deliberations (musrenbangdes), can identify and accommodate these needs in the village work plan and budget. The role of village governments in building partnerships with third parties, such as NGOs, the private sector, and other government agencies is also a determining factor for the success of empowerment programs. This collaboration can expand the reach of the program, strengthen technical and managerial capacity, and create innovations in the sustainable management of marine resources (Dewanti et al., 2023). The reality on the ground often shows that the strategic role of the village government is not optimal. Limited capacity of village apparatus, weak participatory planning, and lack of monitoring and evaluation of programs are common obstacles. Mengkait Village needs a deeper understanding of the extent to which the village government has played a role in the economic empowerment of fishermen, and what are the factors that affect the success or failure of these efforts (Lestari, 2022). This study is relevant because it can provide a real picture of the practice of economic empowerment of fishing communities by village governments in 3T (Disadvantaged, Outermost, and Frontier) areas. This is not only academically important, but also practically in providing input for village development policies and programs in coastal and archipelagic areas (Delvina et al., 2024).

The background of the economic life of fishermen in Mengkait Village is also influenced by distinctive social and cultural factors. Attachment to traditional customs and ways of life, for example, affects their perspective on change and innovation. The empowerment approach cannot be done top-down, but must be based on understanding the local culture and active participation of the community (Ramadhany and Tranggono, 2023). Training programs that do not take into account fishermen's time at sea or do not involve local community leaders often fail because they are considered irrelevant. The village government must have strong managerial and communication skills to bridge the gap between empowerment programs and the social reality of the fishing community. In addition, the economic empowerment of fishermen is also closely related to environmental sustainability issues. Overfishing and the use of destructive fishing gear can reduce marine productivity in the long run. The importance of the role of village governments in educating fishers on sustainable fisheries practices and supporting marine conservation initiatives (Moridu et al., 2023). The Anambas Islands have extraordinary marine wealth, including the potential for marine ecotourism that has not been optimally developed. The village government can initiate programs to diversify the fishermen's economy, for example

through the development of community-based marine tourism, fish farming, or seafood processing. Fishermen not only depend on fishing, but also have alternative sources of income. National policies in villages such as Mengkait are a concern in the program to accelerate the development of border areas. The central government through the National Border Management Agency (BNPP) and related ministries has encouraged the development of basic infrastructure and a productive economy. The effectiveness of this policy is highly dependent on the readiness and active role of the village government as an implementer at the local level (Mikhael, 2022).

This research also departs from the question of how the planning and decision-making mechanism at the village level is. The leadership factor of the village head is also an important variable in the context of empowerment (Adekamwa, Mursalim and Indrayanti, 2024). Village heads who are visionary, open, and able to motivate the community can be a catalyst for change. On the other hand, village heads who are passive or only oriented towards short-term projects will actually hinder the long-term empowerment process. The success of fishermen's economic empowerment also requires an accurate data collection and information system. The village government needs to have complete data on the number, socio-economic conditions, and needs of fishermen to be able to develop targeted programs. Without valid data, empowerment programs risk being ineffective and even redundant. Mengkait Village also faces geographical challenges that are not light. Access to sea transportation that depends on the weather, limited communication networks, and lack of market facilities are obstacles in developing the local economy (Arianto, 2020). Village governments are required to be creative in finding alternative solutions, including through the use of digital technology or inter-village cooperation. Empowerment through economic programs, village governments also play a role in building collective awareness and social solidarity among fishermen. This empowerment is important so that fishermen do not run alone, but are able to form joint business groups, fishermen's cooperatives, or discussion forums that can strengthen their bargaining position (Yusuf, Rusdiyani and Atikah, 2024). This study aims to describe descriptively and analytically how the role of the village government in Mengkait Village in efforts to empower the local fishermen's economy. This includes strategies, programs, challenges, and impacts felt by the community. This research is also expected to be a reference for policies and practices for village development based on marine potential (Didi et al., 2022).

Focusing on a case study in Mengkait Village, this research contributes insight into real practices in the field, not only at the normative level of policy (Meiry Yulia Putri, 2022). In the era of decentralization and village autonomy, local experiences like this are very important to be studied as part of a reflection of a more inclusive and community-based national development policy.

2. Literatur Riview

Village Government

Village government is a system of government administration that is located in the smallest administrative area in the structure of Indonesian government. In accordance with Law Number 6 of 2014 concerning Villages, the village government is the village head and village apparatus as an element of the village government organizer (Kusnadi, 2020). The village government is given authority based on the right of origin, local authority at the village scale, and authority assigned by the central, provincial, or district/city government. The function of village government is very important, especially in the context of the implementation of village autonomy which provides wider space for the village in regulating development, public services, and community empowerment. Village government is not only the executor of administrative tasks from the central government, but also an independent political and social entity in organizing the lives of its people (Muhammad Aditya, Sri Sundari and Marisi Pakpahan, 2024). Village government is the closest form of government to the community. This provides a great opportunity for villages to adjust policies to more specific and in-depth local needs (Sinen, Sasmitha Ningrum and Angela Kabes, 2022). The village government is at the forefront of addressing local problems such as poverty, unemployment, and underdevelopment, including in the economic context of the fishing community. The functions and roles of village government include: (1) Organizing democratic and inclusive government, (2) Providing basic services for the community, (3) Encouraging participatory development based on village potential, (4) Becoming a facilitator of community empowerment in various fields, including the economy.

For village economic development, the village government is expected to play an active role as a facilitator, initiator, and enabler of programs that can improve community welfare. This role requires managerial capacity, adaptive leadership, and a willingness to innovate in exploring and developing local potentials such as the marine and fisheries sectors. The village government also has responsibility in managing the Village Fund (DD) and the Village Fund Allocation (ADD) to fund programs directed at community capacity building. In this case, the fishermen's economic empowerment program is part of the village development strategy that must be planned in an inclusive and accountable manner.

Community Empowerment

Empowerment is a process that aims to increase the capacity of individuals, groups, or communities so that they have more control over decisions that affect their lives, and are able to access and manage resources independently. Empowerment is an effort to increase the strength or capacity of the community in identifying, analyzing, and solving problems on their own, by relying on the resources they have (Widiati and Permatasari, 2022). Community empowerment is a process that is carried out consciously to improve people's ability to access resources, participate in the development process, and make decisions that impact their lives (Ramadhany and Tranggono, 2023). Village empowerment means creating conditions where communities (including vulnerable groups such as

fishermen) have the opportunity and ability to develop economically, socially, and politically. The community empowerment process must be based on the following principles:

1. **Active Participation:** The community should be directly involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of empowerment programs. Empowerment cannot be done top-down without the involvement of villagers as subjects.
2. **Social Justice:** Empowerment should favor historically marginalized groups, such as smallholder fishermen, women heads of households, and the poor.
3. **Self-reliance:** The ultimate goal of empowerment is the creation of an independent society, independent of continuous external assistance.
4. **Based on Local Potential:** Any empowerment program should refer to the resources that local communities have, such as marine potential, local skills, and traditional wisdom.
5. **Sustainability:** Empowerment is not a short-term program. A systemic and sustainable approach is needed so that the results are not only momentary but continue to evolve.

Empowerment strategies include: (1) Training and skills education, (2) Provision of access to capital and technology, (3) Establishment of local economic institutions (cooperatives, joint business groups), (4) Opening of market access, and (5) Assistance and advocacy. The village government as a local actor plays an important role in ensuring that these strategies are implemented according to the needs and capabilities of the community.

Local Fishermen's Economy

Traditional fishermen are a group of coastal communities who depend on the results of fishing in the sea using simple fishing equipment and low technology (Lestari, 2022). They usually carry out fishing activities within a short distance of the coastline (coastal fishing), with a small fleet and limited capital. Traditional fishermen have characteristics: operating in limited waters (2-5 miles from the coast), using simple technology (small boats without engines or outboard engines), irregular incomes, highly dependent on seasons and weather, high dependence on middlemen and collectors in the distribution of catches and lack of access to education, health services, and social security (Fitriyana et al., 2023). Common problems faced by local fishermen include fluctuations in fish prices influenced by market conditions and fishing seasons, limited capital and access to financial institutions, dependence on the *ijon* or middleman system, lack of access to technology and information, lack of business diversification, so they are very vulnerable to climate change and sea conditions, lack of economic institutions, such as fishermen's cooperatives or joint business groups and geographical challenges, especially in archipelago areas such as Anambas which are far from distribution centers and markets (Kusuma et al., 2022).

Despite facing many challenges, local fishermen have great potential if empowered appropriately, namely by (1) The abundance of fish resources in coastal areas, (2) Local wisdom in marine management, (3) The availability of active labor, (4) Opportunities for the development of derivative products from marine products (processing, packaging,

marketing), (5) The potential of marine tourism that can be an alternative source of income. Through the approach of economic empowerment by the village government, these potentials can be developed into a more stable and sustainable source of welfare for the fishing community.

3. Research Methods

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach. This approach was chosen because it was able to provide a deep understanding of the role of the village government in the process of economic empowerment of the fishing community. This research was carried out in Mengkait Village, which is a coastal village in the Anambas Islands area, Riau Islands Province. This location was chosen because the majority of the population makes a living as fishermen, and the village is one of the recipients of village funds with empowerment programs directed at the marine sector. The data collection techniques used in this study include in-depth interviews, field observations and data analysis using interactive analysis. This study uses the theory according to Suharto which has four indicators, namely 1. Planned and collective activities. 2. Improving people's lives. 3. Priority for weak or disadvantaged groups, and 4. It is carried out through a capacity building program.

4. Results and Discussion

The Mengkait Village Government shows its alignment with small and vulnerable fishermen, who have been economically marginalized. This group is the main target in the empowerment program financed through the Village Fund. Some of these priority forms include the distribution of fishing equipment assistance such as nets, outboard machines, and cool boxes to poor fishermen first, training in processing catch that is prioritized to fishermen's wives who do not have a permanent job, and a group-based savings and loan program that provides access to soft capital to fishermen without collateral. Such an affirmative approach shows that empowerment is not neutral, but on the side of those most in need. This is in accordance with Suharto's indicator that empowerment must be prioritized for weak, vulnerable, or disadvantaged groups, both economically and socially. Through the Capacity Building Program, one of the main pillars in empowerment is community capacity building. In Mengkait Village, this is realized through various training, mentoring, and strengthening local institutions. Some of the programs that have been successfully identified are:

- Fishery product processing training by relevant agencies and local NGOs, in collaboration with the village government.
- The formation of productive fishermen groups is accompanied in aspects of business management, recording of catches, and simple financial planning.
- Basic course on digital marketing for fisher youth to market smoked fish products and fish crackers through social media.
- Assistance by Community Empowerment Experts from the district level who help design village economic development strategies based on local potential.

Various forms of capacity building, the village government not only provides "fish", but also teaches "how to fish". This is the essence of empowerment according to Suharto, where the community is not only the object of the program, but transformed into a subject who is able to manage its own life. Based on the four indicators of Edi Suharto's theory, it can be concluded that the Mengkait Village government has carried out its role in empowering the local fishermen's economy quite effectively, although there are still challenges in terms of sustainability and full community participation. The four indicators:

1. Planned and collective: reflected in active participation in Hamlet Conference and Village Government Work Plan planning. One of the important indicators of empowerment, according to Suharto, is that the activities carried out must be planned and collective. In Mengkait Village, the village government showed a fairly good planning capacity through the process of preparing the Village Medium-Term Development Plan and the Village Government Work Plan which were carried out in a participatory manner. This process began with the Hamlet Conference which was then summarized in the Village Conference as an official forum involving community leaders, fishermen groups, women, and village youth. This shows that economic empowerment policies and programs are not unilaterally decided by the village government, but are agreed upon through a collective mechanism. Furthermore, the implementation of empowerment activities also shows the character of mutual cooperation and the spirit of collectivity. For example, in the procurement of fishing gear and boat engines, fishermen's groups are involved in determining the priorities of aid recipients based on internal agreements. Training activities are also often carried out in groups, not individually, by involving several fishing families at once so that the impact is wider and more efficient. Thus, the approach taken by the village government is in line with the principle that empowerment must be designed and implemented through collaboration, not just technocratic intervention.
2. Improving people's lives: it can be seen from the increase in income and the opening of alternative businesses. The main goal of empowerment is to improve people's lives, especially in terms of economic welfare, independence, and resilience to vulnerability. In Mengkait Village, there was a significant change in the condition of some fishing communities after participating in village empowerment programs. One of the positive impacts is the increase in fishermen's household income, especially for those who are able to process their catch into value-added products such as fish crackers, smoked fish, or shredded fish. In addition to the economic aspect, there are also improvements from the social side, such as increasing women's participation in economic activities. Previously, most fishermen's wives only played a role in the domestic realm. But after being involved in training and micro-enterprises, many of them began to have their own income and participate in family decision-making. This shows that empowerment in Mengkait Village not only improves life materially, but also increases the social and cultural capacity of the community.

3. Siding with the weak: the focus of the program is directed at small-scale fishermen and poor families. The third indicator of Suharto's theory states that empowerment must favor weak or disadvantaged groups of society. In the context of Mengkai Village, small fishing groups—especially those who do not own their own boats or depend on daily catches—are the main targets of the empowerment program. The village government expressly sets priority criteria for aid recipients based on poverty data and the results of village deliberations. For example, the boat engine assistance program is first given to fishermen who previously only owned rowing boats or relied on rentals. This is done so that the most vulnerable groups can get out of the snare of economic independence. In addition, housewives from underprivileged families are given household business training and access to marine product processing equipment. This approach is not only socially just, but also fosters solidarity within the fishing community.
4. Capacity building: manifested in training, mentoring, and institutional strengthening of the village economy. Empowerment is not only about providing physical or financial assistance, but also increasing the capacity of individuals and groups so that they can be sustainable in a sustainable manner. The Mengkai Village Government understands this by developing various training, education, and technical assistance programs. One of the flagship programs is the training of fishery product processing skills in collaboration with the marine and fisheries service. The results of the training not only improve technical skills, but also introduce the concepts of small business management and product marketing. Not only training, but the village also encourages the formation of joint business groups and fishermen's cooperatives that are trained to record finances, manage stocks, and build simple marketing networks. In addition, several youths were involved in digital literacy training to use social media to market seafood products from villages to outside the region. This shows that capacity building is carried out comprehensively, ranging from technical, social, to managerial aspects.

This success requires increased synergy between actors (villages, assistants, agencies), as well as more systematic monitoring and evaluation strategies. The four indicators from Suharto do not stand alone, but are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Collective planning will produce programs that are more targeted and able to improve people's lives. Similarly, siding with vulnerable groups will be more effective if it is accompanied by training and capacity building. The village government as the main actor in this context plays an important role as a facilitator, coordinator, as well as a motivator so that the fishing community is able to transform from a development object to a development subject. Many successes have been achieved but there are still a number of challenges. One of them is the dependence on assistance and the lack of follow-up initiatives from some fishermen's groups after the program is completed. Some groups also have difficulties in managing business finances and have not fully understood the importance of financial recording and

market evaluation. This shows that empowerment is not fully complete, and still requires continuous assistance and advanced training for economic independence to be truly realized.

Strengthening a participatory approach, improving the quality of training, and building an accountable and sustainable program evaluation system, empowerment in Mengkait Village has the potential to become a model for other coastal villages in the Riau Islands.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that the Mengkait Village government has carried out the role of economic empowerment of local fishermen quite effectively based on four empowerment indicators according to Edi Suharto: planned and collective activities, improvement of community life, alignment with vulnerable groups, and capacity building. Programs such as training, fishing gear assistance, establishment of business groups, and marketing of marine products have had a positive impact on increasing income, the role of women in the village economy, and the growth of fishermen's small business independence. However, there are still challenges such as dependence on aid, lack of follow-up initiatives, and low financial literacy and business management. For this reason, it is necessary to strengthen continuous mentoring, improve the quality of training, and develop an accountable program evaluation and monitoring system. Village governments must continue to encourage collaboration with external parties and optimize local potential as the basis for sustainable economic development. The experience of Mengkait Village can be used as a model for other coastal villages in designing inclusive and contextual empowerment strategies.

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