

# REINFORCING COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION MODELS THROUGH EMPOWERMENT IN CRITICAL LAND MANAGEMENT

*by* Rismaneswati Rismaneswati

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# REINFORCING COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION MODELS THROUGH EMPOWERMENT IN CRITICAL LAND MANAGEMENT

Dewa Oka Suparwata<sup>1</sup>, Didi Rukmana<sup>2</sup>, Andi Nixia Tenriawaru<sup>3</sup>, Risma Neswati<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Student at the Doctoral Program of Agricultural Science of Hasanuddin University, Indonesia

<sup>2,3</sup> Department of Agribusiness, Faculty of Agriculture, Hasanuddin University, Indonesia

<sup>4</sup> Department of Soil Science, Faculty of Agriculture, Hasanuddin University, Indonesia

E-mail: [suparwata\\_do@umgo.ac.id](mailto:suparwata_do@umgo.ac.id), [drukmana@unhas.ac.id](mailto:drukmana@unhas.ac.id), [nixia\\_gany@yahoo.com](mailto:nixia_gany@yahoo.com), [neswati76@gmail.com](mailto:neswati76@gmail.com)

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## Abstract

Making land resources sustainable requires a participatory management model from the community. The process of community empowerment on critical land infused various skills, knowledge, and abilities to break out of helplessness. The aim of the study is to examine the strengthening of the community participation model through community empowerment in the management of critical land in the KBR program. This is a literature study on various sources of critical land empowerment. The results showed that the empowerment case in the community-based KBR program in general has been perceived by some of the empowered community and has implications for technical aspects such as; nursery, tree planting, tree distribution, plant maintenance. Meanwhile, non-technical aspects such as: socialization, knowledge, and institutions. However, some obstacles are faced, such as: negative perceptions of the results that are relatively long, not profitable, reduce the field of agriculture, lack of critical awareness, participation, skills. Sometimes there is rejection, "harsh criticism", and thinking that is directed towards environmental affairs belongs to the government. The failure of the critical land rehabilitation program was caused by a top-down instruction pattern, weak involvement in program planning, and weak synchronization of programs involving customary villages. The interests of policy makers are often contrary to the reality on the ground, therefore, the right path is that the participatory approach that is taken must empower local communities. This indicates that empowerment is specific with diverse community characteristics, so it is important to involve local communities and their wisdom.

**Keywords:** Community Participation; Critical Land; Empowerment; KBR

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## INTRODUCTION

The lack of availability of productive agricultural lands is a strategic issue and the focus of the current program. Mapping of agricultural land is mostly done to determine policies for coping with and the movement of reconditioning degraded agricultural land. Indications of land degradation reported by local communities are due to a decrease in vegetation density (Stringer and Reed, 2007). This gradual decline in productivity and degradation has resulted in the formation of critical land. The increasingly critical land due to this degradation is caused by erosion and irresponsible human activities (Sarminah et al., 2018). The existence of an increase in population and an increase in demand for services on land will threaten the sustainability of the quality and function of natural land resources (Dumanski and Pieri, 2000). Conservation efforts of critical land in this condition are sometimes difficult to maintain (Maria et al., 2019). This has resulted in an ecological imbalance with the exploitation of resources beyond the carrying capacity of the environment and human activities, without soil and water conservation measures, thus increasing degraded land (Sarminah et al., 2018). Land that is increasingly degraded, it is also increasingly difficult to restore it (Styger et al., 2007). This phenomenon is prolonged due to the lack of understanding of the community about using land wisely and the lack of conservation actions. The prolonged aftermath of this phenomenon is the emergence of critical agricultural lands that are unable to support the community farming system.

Even if they choose to keep farming on degraded or critical land, land productivity is not able to support household growth, so farmers look for new land and are forced to leave existing agricultural areas (Barbier, 2000). In this case, consideration of commercial and social values is needed that can outline the

conceptual differences between natural ecosystem landscapes and those that can be used by farmers (Doley et al., 2012), so this is where the impact of human intervention becomes an important issue in the future on natural systems (Dumanski dan Pieri, 2000). This is to bridge the polarization of socio-economic goals with environmental sustainability from the aspect of preserving agricultural land so that it is not critical. This is due to the long impact of the criticality of this land will affect farmers' decisions to encroach on forest areas or shifting cultivation.

Efforts to restore critical land must be carried out holistically and integrated with various parties involved in the land rehabilitation program. This is to facilitate coordination, synchronization and distribution of information to the community regarding the land rehabilitation techniques being carried out. The model for implementing land rehabilitation programs is implemented through the following activities: (a) reforestation, (b) plant maintenance, (c) plant enrichment, and (d) application of vegetative and civil technical soil conservation techniques on critical and unproductive lands (Presidential Regulation of the Republic Indonesia Number 89 of 2007 concerning GNRHL; Government Regulation Number 76 of 2008 concerning Forest Rehabilitation and Reclamation). Several results on analysis of critical land management show that community participation is low in planning and evaluation, and is moderate in program implementation (Azis, 2006; Pudjianto, 2009; Qirom, 2010; Dipokusumo, 2011; Ansori, 2012; Sandyatma and Hariadi, 2012; Dewi, 2013; Suparwata et al., 2016; Suparwata et al., 2019). This is presumably due to low authority and lack of empowerment to the community, so that this incident has contributed to hindering the success of critical land rehabilitation activities. Low community participation indicates a lack of community

empowerment or ability in managing critical land. In view of the increase in the productivity of agricultural land, reconstruction is not only about physical improvements but more importantly on giving capacity to the community itself. This is where the role of empowerment activities becomes a solution in capacity building, strengthening local institutions, critical awareness, expanding information, and being able to adapt to technological changes in managing agricultural land.

Empowerment is a process and an effort to obtain or provide power, strength, or ability to weak individuals and communities so that they can identify, analyze, determine the needs and potentials and problems faced and at the same time choose alternative solutions by optimizing their own resources and potential independently (Widjajanti, 2011). Community empowerment is "people centered, participatory, empowering, and sustainable" (Chambers, 1995). Community empowerment can be viewed as increasing community control for joint results in improving their lives. In micro terms, the empowerment process is a process of control and transition from helplessness. The community empowerment approach can be carried out in an integrated manner for better life and better decision making (Sadan, 2004).

Making land resources sustainable requires an inclusive management model from the community. The perspective of empowerment is not only born from government programs but how to become a critical land rehabilitation project on the initiative of, by, and for the community. The critical land management approach model is grouped into four typologies, namely: reforestation, plant maintenance, plot enrichment and use of conservation techniques (Government Regulation Number 76 of 2008 concerning Forest Rehabilitation and Reclamation; Ditjen BPDASPS, 2015; Puspitojati et al., 2014). From this typology, one of them is described in community empowerment programs in community nurseries (KBR). These activities are explicitly translated into forms of community empowerment.

Based on the above points, the present study aimed to examine the strengthening of the community participation model through empowerment in the management of critical land. The case discussed in this study is related to the community seed plantation program (KBR). Therefore, by increasing community empowerment, the success of reconditioning critical land will be achieved.

## METHODS

This is a literature study which examines cases of community participation related to the implementation of community empowerment in critical land management. The literature used comes from various sources, including: journals (national and international), books, research reports, and proceeding papers. The steps in the literature study were: (1) conducting a search for literature related to the topic; (2) read the scientific writing; (3) evaluating all writings; (4) compiling a summary; and (5) combine and make a flow scientific descriptions. The results of this literature review are then used to provide an overview, explanation, and recommendations in managing critical land.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Empowerment Review to Strengthen Participation in Critical Land

Empowerment is "power" that is related to power (Sadan, 2004). Empowerment efforts can be viewed from three sides, namely: enabling, empowering, and protecting (Kartasasmita, 1997). In a broader sense, empowerment is the expansion of freedom of choice and action. It means increasing one's authority and control over resources and decisions that affect one's life. Empowerment is the expansion of the assets and abilities of the poor to participate in, negotiate, influence, control, and hold the institutions that affect their lives accountable. There are four

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important elements in community empowerment efforts, namely: (a) access to information, (b) inclusion and participation, (c) accountability, and (d) capacity of local organizations (Narayan, 2002). Empowerment can also be interpreted as an effort to develop, to be independent, to empower, and to strengthen the bargaining position of the lower classes of society (Najiyati et al., 2005). Empowerment implies an emphasis on the injustice of local people's voice, choice and access. Empowerment strategies need to address formal and informal institutions that hinder the poor and marginalized from access opportunities to government, service providers and the private sector (Helling et al., 2005). In the implementation of empowerment, several problems were found such as: resistance, conflict, community awareness, the ability to organize communities, and low empowerment outcomes (Sadan, 2004). Awareness is important, so that the empowered community is able to carry out a series of empowerment independently, responsibly, sustainably, because it involves their life (Pratama et al., 2018).

The main approach model in empowerment is that the community is not the object of various development projects, but is the subject of its own development efforts. So community empowerment must adhere to the following approaches: First, the effort must be targeted. This is popularly called partiality. It is addressed directly to those in need, with programs designed to solve their problems and according to their needs. Second, this program must directly involve or even be implemented by the target community. Including the people who will be assisted has several objectives, namely so that the assistance is effective because it is in accordance with their wishes and abilities and needs. In addition, it also increases community empowerment with experience in designing, implementing, managing and being accountable for efforts to improve themselves and their economy (Astutie et al., 2020). Third, use a group approach, because individually, it is difficult for poor people to solve the problems they face. Also the scope of assistance becomes too broad if it is handled individually. Therefore, the group approach is the most effective, and it is seen from the use of resources is also more efficient. In addition, business partnerships between these groups and more advanced groups must be continuously nurtured and maintained in a mutually beneficial and advancing manner (Kartasasmita, 1997).

In the case of community empowerment in its participation related to critical land management, it can be done by choosing the type of approach. Involving the community in critical land rehabilitation activities is an indication of the use value and willingness to assist in solving the degradation problems faced, especially in hilly land encroachment (Olukoye and Kinyamario, 2009). Empowerment models that can be implemented can be in the form of KBR empowerment.

KBR's participatory approach with community empowerment is aimed at rehabilitating forests and lands that have become critical. This activity can be carried out by means of self-management by community groups. Types of plants are selected based on local needs and / or through agreements with the government. In its implementation, the community is given guidance and socialization which is then given full authority and power to manage KBR land. The government provides a stimulus in the form of funds for the development of the nursery and the preparation of the nursery. Here the involvement of the members of the KBR group becomes a unit to help each other to prepare plant seeds. Not a few of the KBR groups experienced stagnation due to weak coordination between group members. The transparency mechanism in reporting the KBR budget also needs attention. KBR's community empowerment approach views the community as a "dynamic" system, where the mobilization of critical land resources will be able to be rehabilitated if the interests, aspirations and abilities of the community are synchronized together.

In measuring empowerment, first the importance of analyzing physical capital, human capital and social capital, which can be used as indicators of empowerment activities. The measures of the empowerment process include: the quality and quantity of community involvement, program planning, implementation, and evaluation in a sustainable manner (Widjajanti, 2011). In the end empowering the community is essentially an effort to increase the dignity of the layers of society, who are currently unable to escape the trap of poverty and underdevelopment. In other words, empowering is enabling and empowering the community (Kartasasmita, 1997). Thus, achieving the goal of successful empowerment requires participatory development management, honest-fair-transparent government, democracy, and community involvement in decision making.

#### The Case of Community Empowerment in Community Seed Gardens (KBR)

One of the activities to support the forest and land rehabilitation program with community empowerment is the construction of the People's seed garden (KBR). KBR is meant to provide tree seedlings or multipurpose plants (Multi Purpose Tree Species / MPTS) with the aim of improving community welfare and at the same time supporting the restoration of function and carrying capacity of watersheds (DAS). The People's seed garden is carried out independently by community groups. The seeds from the People's seed garden are used for rehabilitating forests and critical land as well as for greening the environment. Community groups implementing KBR are community groups that plan, implement and supervise the development of KBR (Permenhut RI Number: p.12 / menhut-ii / 2013, concerning the Implementation Guidelines for KBR; Director of Forest Plant Seed Development, 2011). KBR began to be implemented in 2010 by the Indonesian government in a participatory manner (Dewi, 2013). The KBR program is one of the government's efforts to further empower the community in an effort to reduce the rate of destruction of forests and critical land (Butolo et al, 2014).

Empowerment is not merely providing socialization or ceremonial training, but rather involving and devoting all capacities and abilities of the community to be able to take part in managing critical land. Many studies on the implementation of empowerment in the KBR program have been carried out in Indonesia. The empowerment study report reported by Wibawa (2014), who conducted a study in Sumberrejo Village, Tempel District, Sleman Regency, found that community empowerment has implications for capacity building in the following aspects: (1) Technical aspects are shown by farmers becoming more aware of seed techniques, seed methods and planting, knowledge of plant manufacturing techniques increases; (2) The institutional aspect is shown by a more organized farmer group organization, the organization can run better, can work as a solid team; (3) The administrative aspect is shown by the farmers getting additional knowledge of financial administration, the administration of activity reports is also getting better; and (4) other aspects; especially the entrepreneurial aspect: the opening of new insights and ideas that nurseries can be used as new business fields. Furthermore, a study in Babadan Village, Malang Regency, by Anisykurlillah (2014), carried out community empowerment efforts in the KBR Program including: giving seeds, providing funds, education and technical guidance, mentoring and providing access. This community empowerment program through KBR has implications for improving society from a social, economic and environmental perspective.

Empowerment activities when carried out with a "proper and correct" process will certainly provide significant changes in the community being fostered. As part of facilitating empowerment, it is best to provide space for the community to be able to learn to make decisions from a series of planned empowerment programs.

The given authority will increase awareness, discipline and independence in managing critical land. This is where the importance of appreciating the thoughts, energy and services provided by the community for rehabilitating critical lands. Society as a partnership will be able to improve itself and reduce phenomena, making it strong in all existing conditions. This is all absorbed through "learning from experience" in managing land, so that the community can determine which aspects are lacking and which aspects can be continued in the KBR program for critical land rehabilitation.

In contrast to the KBR study in Pohuwato District, the results of the evaluation of community capacity through the KBR program showed a low capacity of the community as indicated by indicators of knowledge, organizational level, and training. In this case, empowerment needs to get the government's attention to increase community capacity. This program is considered new and not maximal in an effort to increase community capacity (Butolo et al., 2014). The dilemma of empowerment in KBR is certainly still felt by the community. The fact is that the KBR program has many farmer groups that have failed to provide seedlings for rehabilitation. Funds have been disbursed by the government but the program is not running as planned. Planning for KBR is sometimes not in accordance with the biophysical needs of the land to be rehabilitated, because the program appears at the central level down to the bottom. This is confirmed by Nuddin (2007), that the main cause of the unsuccessful management of critical land from a management perspective is weak planning performance. The existence of dominant policies at the central and provincial levels results in implementation in the field that is not in accordance with social and biophysical realities. This is confirmed by Kansil et al., (2016), actually community empowerment is not only a short-lived management tool. The community will feel reluctant to accept the program if the strategies implemented in their empowerment are short-lived.

#### Empowerment of Critical Land on Local Community Participation-based

Lifting local wisdom and restoring the "spirit" of empowerment means elevating local communities in the global arena. Local communities must receive more space and attention, in order to increase their capacity and increase their living assets. People as individuals in rural areas are seen as the subject of household agriculture as having a vital role in social contestation and agricultural civilization. The overlapping of interests has destroyed the fortress of empowerment of rural communities to rise up and be empowered. In addition, most people have relatively low abilities, knowledge, education, mastery of technology, and access to information. This has implications for the worsening of community empowerment in rural areas. The long tail of this condition has resulted in the addition of rural poverty and social vulnerability in the fabric of community life.

The fragile capacity and capability of the community has resulted in low abilities and skills to manage agricultural land. The emergence of greed, arrogance, and the dogma of "feeling in control of nature", results in less wise use of agricultural land, by not applying soil conservation techniques in farming. Empowerment is sometimes difficult to accept by the community, because of the striking pattern and limited to socialization ceremonies. The community needs action to be able to react by always being given assistance through facilitators, and / or the role of related stakeholders. Top-down empowerment patterns are still widely applied to date, so that the material in the empowerment process seems to bounce off and it is difficult to be absorbed by the community. Especially in the community of critical land rehabilitation, who postscript still see what the economic benefits of the program are, and sometimes forget other supporting aspects that are just as important.

The implementation of empowerment models in critical land rehabilitation has made many changes, such as in the KBR program, agroforestry and community forests. However, the implications on a continuing basis are still a puzzle. Program implementation will be active when it gets an injection of funds from the government, and after the program funding is over, it becomes stuck. This indicates that the activities carried out are still coercive in nature, and there is no critical awareness from the community itself. This is because the planning side of community programs is rarely involved and does not contribute to decision making. In view of this, the conceptual model that relates to this is "to return the spirit of empowerment of critical land to local communities". Actually, the community has the potential to be empowered if they are given power, authority and responsibility for the management of critical land. As stated by Uphoff (1992), rural communities have a lot to contribute to participatory strategies for sustainable agricultural development efforts because the community has ideas, skills, technical insights, organizational capabilities, as a partner or target group. The participatory approach taken is a good starting point in empowering the community.

The success of empowerment requires the inclusion and participation of local communities. The paradigm evolution is directed at a community participation model that interconnects various sectors (Callahan, 2007). Actually, community participation is the power of citizens. In short, it encourages significant social reforms among the public to share and receive its benefits (Arnstein, 1969). In this dimension, community participation can be of high value, even false value (Bell and Morse, 2004). This requires the integration of science and local knowledge approaches in responding to environmental change and assessing land degradation appropriately (Stringer and Reed, 2007). The existence of good knowledge and understanding will have a positive impact on community participation (Suparwata et al., 2016).

Local knowledge and scientific knowledge need to be included as a source of knowledge in terms of monitoring and assessing land degradation (Reed et al., 2011). Development that does not consider local priorities, local livelihoods, and past experiences will lead to apathy, reluctance and often does not participate. To achieve effective participation, it is necessary to involve the community from the start when policies, projects and goals are set (Twyman, 2000). Involving local communities in resource management is a solution to reducing environmental degradation (Roka, 2019), as well as providing space for local communities to restore and manage critical lands in a participatory manner.

The use of sustainable natural resources places the basis of local communities as managers because they are more aware of ecological processes and practices and have the ability to manage natural resources (Bros et al., 1998). Community traditions contribute to preventing land degradation through rehabilitation of degraded land and restoration. The goal is to stabilize degraded land to become productive, by first identifying degraded land uses (Chasek et al., 2014). Citizens and the government play an active role, are involved and focus, which is a model developed focused on value creation. The location of the community here is as an investor and shareholder which implies participatory creation involving partnerships, joint investment, common interests, cooperation and joint ownership between the community and the government (Callahan, 2007). In other words, effective participation requires engaging the "right people" in the "right way" (Chess et al., 2000). This indicates that the community will involve themselves based on their opportunities, abilities and knowledge in each participatory process of critical land rehabilitation.

The failure of the "top down" approach in the past has encouraged "bottom-up" community involvement in land and environmental management. This approach requires careful analysis of various case studies in measuring and determining indicators of sustainability and the benefits that can be achieved (Fraser et al., 2006). This community-based natural resource management initiative requires local opinion and understanding to explain the local relationship with the environment. This reflection of the power relations and balance of the program's conservation and development goals is shaped by the extent of the government's agenda and local priorities. The point is that in the development process local community "participation" and "empowerment" become a framework in community-based natural resource management (Twyman, 2000).

Local community-based management is a suitable and effective strategy for conservation and sustainable development, because it is based on the traditional paradigm of fully protecting nature (Goltenboth and Hutter, 2004). As such, participation must empower and increase public knowledge, this is the key to community-based management for more effective public participation initiatives. Participation can affect public trust, confidence and decision to participate through information gathering, consultation, planning, implementation and evaluation (Roka, 2019). In the end, the participation of local communities contributes significantly in determining the direction of success in empowering critical land rehabilitation.

#### CONCLUSION

Increasing participation is carried out by empowering, namely implanting various skills to get out of helplessness, taking advantage of opportunities to increase access and assets to achieve welfare. In agriculture, empowerment in the management of critical land is an integral part of poverty alleviation, because land is the primary resources for farmers to do their farming and earn income from these activities. This participatory approach to empowering critical land can take the form of reforestation, plant enrichment, plant maintenance, and application of various soil conservation techniques. Many empowerment cases have been implemented in order to achieve the welfare of critical land rehabilitation communities, one of which is the KBR program. In general, these programs have been acknowledged by some of the empowered community and have implications for technical aspects; nursery, tree planting, tree distribution, plant maintenance. Meanwhile, non-technical aspects such as: mindset, socialization, skills, knowledge, institutional, administration, entrepreneurship. A further correlation of empowerment is a balance between economic, socio-cultural and environmental interests, to achieve harmonization of nature and human life. The obstacle to unsuccessful community participation on degraded lands is due to the top-down instruction pattern. The interests of policy makers are often at odds with reality on the ground, so the participation model that is carried out must be local. This is to empower the community, which is specific with the characteristics of a diverse society. Therefore, involving local communities and consideration of local wisdom of each region will have more impact on the successful empowerment of the rehabilitating community.

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#### Conflict of Interest

The author of the article declares no conflict of interest.

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