

Strengthening Farmer Group Institutions in Data, Information, and Administration

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Article History:

Received: Februari 10, 2023

Revised: Februari 28, 2023

Accepted: Maret 19, 2023

Published: Maret 31, 2023

Keywords: Agricultural Extension, Community Service, Data And Administration, Farmer Groups, Institutional Strengthening.

Abstract. The main problem faced by farmer groups in South Dumai District is the weak management of data, information, and group administration, which affects the effectiveness of agricultural development planning and evaluation. This community service activity aims to strengthen farmer group institutions by improving their capacity in data and administrative management. The method employed was a community organizing approach through participatory extension activities, group discussions, and initial mentoring involving 33 participants consisting of farmer group administrators and members. The results indicate an increase in farmers' understanding and awareness of the importance of data and orderly administration as a basis for planning, decision-making, and evaluation of agricultural development programs. In addition, early social changes emerged in the form of collective awareness and the initiative of group leaders to actively strengthen institutional functions. Strengthening farmer group institutions through proper data and administrative management is expected to support sustainable agricultural development and improve farmers' welfare.

1. INTRODUCTION

Development is essentially a planned and continuous process of social change aimed at improving the quality of life and the welfare of society. Katz (1965), as cited in Tjokroamidjojo (1978), emphasizes that development is directed toward transforming specific social conditions into situations that are considered better and more desirable by society. In the context of national development, its success is largely determined by the quality of human resources (HR) who possess skills, knowledge, and competencies in accordance with development needs across various sectors, including the agricultural sector.

The agricultural sector continues to be a major livelihood for a large proportion of rural communities in Indonesia. Data from the Central Statistics Agency indicate that agriculture absorbs a substantial share of the labor force and contributes significantly to regional economies, particularly in agrarian-based areas. However, agricultural development is not determined solely by production aspects, but also by the quality of farmer institutions, data and information systems, and the orderly administration of farmer groups as the main actors in agricultural development (Mardikanto and Pepi, 2019).

Agricultural extension serves as a strategic instrument in supporting sustainable agricultural development. Van den Ban and Hawkins (1999) define extension as a deliberate communication process designed to assist individuals or groups in making appropriate decisions in their farming activities. The extension philosophy of *helping people to help themselves* positions farmers as subjects of development rather than merely as objects of program implementation (Kelsey and Hearne, 1955, cited in Mardikanto and Pepi, 2019). Accordingly, strengthening the capacity of farmer groups through extension activities has become an urgent necessity to enhance farmers' independence and competitiveness.

Entering the era of Society 5.0, advancements in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) demand the readiness of agricultural human resources, including farmer groups, to manage data and information accurately, efficiently, and in an integrated manner. Farmer groups play strategic roles as learning forums, production units, and cooperation platforms, all of which require strong institutional support and orderly administrative management. Agricultural Extension Centers play a crucial role as institutions responsible for fostering and assisting farmer groups, as well as serving as centers for agricultural data and information at the sub-district level (Mulyani, 2020).

One of the main issues faced by farmer groups in various regions, including South Dumai District, is the weak management of data, information, and group administration. Qualitatively, this condition is reflected in the limited understanding among farmer group administrators regarding the importance of recording membership data, farming activities, production outcomes, and group financial administration. Quantitatively, it is evidenced by incomplete administrative records, irregular data reporting to agricultural extension officers, and data inconsistencies across institutional levels, from the village to the central government.

In fact, farmer group data constitute a primary source within the integrated agricultural data system. Accurate and up-to-date data form the basis for program planning, policy decision-making, the distribution of assistance, and the evaluation of agricultural development (Mulyani, 2020). Disorderly administration and weak data management have the potential to hinder the effectiveness of development programs and ultimately affect farmers' welfare.

Based on these objective conditions, South Dumai District was selected as the focus of this community service program because it has active farmer groups that still require institutional strengthening, particularly in the areas of data, information, and administration. This Community Service Activity focuses on extension and mentoring as efforts to enhance the capacity of farmer groups to manage their institutions more professionally and sustainably.

The expected social changes resulting from this community service activity include increased awareness, knowledge, and skills of farmer groups in data and administrative management, the establishment of orderly group administration, and the availability of accurate and accountable agricultural data. In the long term, strengthening farmer group institutions is expected to support the development of high-quality agricultural human resources, improve the welfare of farming communities, and promote competitive and sustainable agricultural development.

2. METHODS

This community service activity employed a community organizing approach by positioning farmer groups as active subjects in both the planning and implementation processes. The subjects of the activity were farmer groups in South Dumai District, Dumai City, involving 33 participants consisting of group administrators and members. The activities were conducted at the Agricultural Extension Center of South Dumai District. The selection of the location and community partners was based on the strategic role of the BPP as a center for guidance and assistance, as well as the needs of farmer groups for institutional strengthening in the areas of data, information, and administration.

The activity planning process was carried out in a participatory manner through coordination and preliminary discussions with agricultural extension officers and representatives of farmer groups to identify key problems and priority needs. The assisted community was involved in determining the focus of activities, enabling joint action plans to be developed in accordance with the conditions and capacities of the farmer groups. This approach aimed to foster a sense of ownership and increase the active participation of farmer groups in the community service activities.

The methods used to achieve the objectives of the community service included participatory extension, group discussions, and initial mentoring related to the management of data and farmer group administration. The delivery of materials was conducted interactively and educationally to ensure participants understood the importance of orderly administration and the utilization of agricultural data in supporting agricultural development. These methods were chosen to encourage sustainable changes in knowledge, attitudes, and skills among farmer groups.

The stages of the community service activities consisted of preparation, implementation, evaluation, and follow-up. The preparation stage included coordination, material development, and readiness of supporting facilities. The implementation stage took

the form of extension activities conducted on Wednesday, January 11, 2023, at the BPP of South Dumai District. This was followed by an evaluation through discussions and question-and-answer sessions, as well as follow-up actions encouraging the application of the extension outcomes in farmer group administrative practices.

3. RESULTS

The community service activities in the form of extension and mentoring for strengthening farmer group institutions in data, information, and administration in South Dumai District generated participatory and constructive process dynamics. During the implementation, farmer groups were actively involved in extension sessions, discussions, and question-and-answer activities addressing the importance of agricultural data, orderly administration, and the institutional role of farmer groups in agricultural development. The range of activities included material presentations, group discussions, and simple simulations of farmer group administrative record-keeping.

The results indicate an improvement in farmers' understanding of the functions of agricultural data and information as the basis for planning, decision-making, and evaluation of agricultural development programs. From a technical perspective, participants began to understand the types of data that need to be recorded in farmer group administration, such as membership data, farming activities, production outcomes, and group activity reports. This represents an initial step in addressing community problems related to weak administrative systems and data reporting within farmer groups.

In addition to changes in knowledge and skills, this community service activity also triggered early social changes at the community level. A new awareness emerged among farmer group administrators regarding the importance of orderly administration as part of institutional strengthening. Several participants demonstrated initiatives to take a more active role as group mobilizers, with the potential to develop into local leaders in the management of farmer group data and administration. This collective awareness constitutes important social capital toward social transformation and the self-reliance of farmer groups.

4. DISCUSSION

The results of this community service activity are consistent with the concept of agricultural extension as an empowerment process that positions farmers as subjects of development. Van den Ban and Hawkins (1999) emphasize that extension aims not only to transfer knowledge but also to encourage behavioral change and better decision-making. The

increased understanding and awareness of farmer groups regarding the importance of data and administration indicate the occurrence of a social learning process within the assisted community.

From the perspective of community organizing theory, the active involvement of farmer groups in the planning and implementation processes reflects the principles of participation and empowerment. Mardikanto and Pepi (2019) argue that strengthening farmer institutions can only be achieved when communities are directly involved in every stage of the activity. The findings of this community service demonstrate that a participatory approach is effective in fostering a sense of ownership and collective responsibility for the sustainability of farmer group institutions.

The emerging social changes, such as increased administrative awareness and the initiative of local leaders, can be understood through the lens of social capital. Kelsey and Hearne (1955) explain that effective extension encourages the formation of local leadership and new norms that support community progress. In this context, orderly administration and data management become new institutional norms that strengthen the functions of farmer groups as learning forums, production units, and cooperation platforms.

Theoretically, the results of this community service also support the view that data and information are key elements in modern agricultural development. Mulyani (2020) emphasizes the importance of accurate and integrated agricultural data systems in supporting development policies and programs. Therefore, strengthening farmer group institutions through enhanced capacity in data and administrative management not only has impacts at the group level but also contributes to achieving agricultural development goals and improving community welfare in a sustainable manner.

5. CONCLUSION

Development is essentially a systematic effort to improve the quality of life and the welfare of society, which is strongly determined by the readiness of human resources (HR). Theoretically, human-centered development places the enhancement of knowledge, skills, and competencies as key factors for success. In the context of the Society 5.0 era, characterized by rapid advances in information and communication technology, HR readiness is required not only in the formal sector but also at the grassroots level, including farmer groups as strategic actors in agricultural development.

The results of the community service activity indicate that farmer groups play important roles as learning forums, production units, and cooperation platforms; however, they

still face limitations in managing group administration. Theoretically, farmer group administration is an essential instrument of organizational governance, as it serves as a source of accurate and sustainable data related to human resources, production, marketing, partnerships, as well as facilities and infrastructure. Weak record-keeping and documentation result in less optimal planning, decision-making, and evaluation of farmer group activities over time.

Through this community service activity, it can be reflected that strengthening the administrative capacity of farmer groups is an urgent need that must be addressed in a structured and sustainable manner. Therefore, active support from higher education institutions through continuous community service programs is recommended as a form of knowledge and technology dissemination. In addition, it is necessary to design extension or non-formal education activities oriented toward hands-on practice, particularly related to the types of farmer group administrative records, procedures for their preparation, and their completion, so that farmer groups are able to build orderly and accountable administrative systems that support agricultural development planning in the future.

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