

Family Empowerment: A New Approach to Social Development Experience of the Posdaya

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Abstract

Pos Pemberdayaan Keluarga or *Posdaya* (Family Empowerment Post), as a model of community empowerment in Indonesia, was implemented in 2006. It followed the Indonesian National Family Planning Coordinating Board (BKKBN), which was built on a community-based approach rather than a vertical clinical approach, through which the community became the focal point of the program, inviting young families to participate in family planning. Within five years, this community-based approach was expanded nationally. Through this approach, communities were invited to establish Family Planning posts (KB Posts) in each village to extend family planning services to the participants. KB Posts eventually became the center of the national family planning program. In 1989, thanks to the community-based KB Posts and family empowerment approaches, the Indonesian family planning programs received the United Nations Population Award. In 2000, the UN launched the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) program, but the Indonesian government showed little initial interest. However, a non-profit NGO, the Damandiri Foundation, continued the family empowerment program through *Posdaya* in the villages to achieve MDGs with the help of universities, local governments, and volunteers. *Posdaya* is a forum to empower village families to jointly build the "*beyond family planning programs*" in the areas of education, entrepreneurship, and the environment, in addition to health, family planning, and the status of women. When the Indonesian government began its massive community development program in 2015, the *Posdaya* ceased its operation with the number of *Posdayas* at about 60,000, many subsequently incorporated into the government program.

Keywords

Posdaya, Damandiri Foundation, family empowerment, bottom-up approach, community development, MDGs

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Introduction and Background

In the 1970s and 1980s, the world's economists identified the "population bomb" or the "population explosion" as the greatest obstacle to the third world pulling itself out of abject poverty and achieving sustainable growth. (Ehrlich, 1968; Lenica & Sauvy, 1962). The major international donors such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Bank, as well as think tanks like the Population Council and the Ford Foundation, invested heavily in national family planning efforts to bring the rate of population growth more in line with rates of economic development and the available natural and environmental resources (Meadows et al., 1972; Ness & Ando, 1985).

Indonesia was one of the recipients of this international assistance, which it used to leverage government commitment and financial resources into one of the most widely recognized and highly acclaimed family planning programs in the world. There are a number of important reasons why the Indonesian program achieved the success it did, such as the political commitment from the highest to the lowest levels of government, strong and visionary program management, and substantial international financial and technical assistance.

However, one factor in particular played a major role in the success of the program. The Indonesian National Family Planning Coordinating Board (BKKBN) recognized in 1973 that the static clinic approach to recruiting and serving family planning services users would not be sufficient to overcome the reluctance of users who were members of a highly illiterate, rural, agrarian population that was steeped in a conservative religion and culture. Consequently, rather than having the people come to the family planning clinic, the national program took family planning to the people. A network of family planning field workers was established through the local communities to serve women of reproductive age with information and services. These same field workers helped establish village family planning posts consisting of satisfied users of the program to motivate other women in the village and to assist in contraceptive resupply. The program shifted its focus from trying to recruit individuals to recruiting entire villages on the grounds that fertility limitation benefitted the community as a whole. Thus, the village became the basic vehicle for reaching the individual families. This was a new innovation in the implementation of family planning programs in the world, supplanting the vertical and clinical approach.

With the village as the primary focus, the family planning program, which promoted the small, happy, and prosperous family norm, began addressing other development issues, such as skills development and income generation activities for those villages that were most successful in recruiting and maintaining participants in this new family planning approach. Thus, family planning and development were seen as going hand in hand. As mentioned previously, the national family planning program, including the private sector programs, achieved an enviable

record of success within a period of just over 20 years of increasing contraception use, reaching over 60 percent of families, and reducing fertility to near replacement level. For this, the United Nations awarded the Population Award to BKKBN in 1989 (BKKBN, 2019).

As preparations were being set for the International Conference on Population and Development which was held in Cairo in 1994, some doubts were beginning to be expressed in Indonesia and other countries that had also achieved a high level of success in their family planning programs that curbing population growth was not enough. While an important contributor to development, family planning was insufficient to effect a major change in the economic and social livelihood of individuals. Individuals and communities in Indonesia were beginning to ask family planning program managers why they were still so poor despite having accepted family planning and having kept the size of their family small!

The Cairo conference addressed this concern head-on and declared that the issue of development is more than controlling population numbers. Rather it is an amalgam of people-centered factors, from reproductive and sexual health, including family planning, human rights, especially for women, education, job creation, and the like (United Nations, 1995; United Nations Population Fund, 1994). From the United Nations-sponsored Cairo conference, a number of other landmark international conferences were spun off, including the International Conference on Women and Development in Beijing in 1995, the International Conference on Social Development in Copenhagen in 1997, and others. At approximately the same time the world came to the realization of the importance of human rights and human development, which gave rise to the Human Development Index. All of these conferences and forums ultimately came to a consensus on development targets which are mutually intertwined. The culmination of the 1990s development conferences was an agreement in the year 2000 known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with eight goals to be achieved by 2015. It was succeeded by the current Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in 2015 with 17 goals to be achieved by 2030 (United Nations, 2020).

Indonesia's Commitment to the MDGs

The aim of the MDGs and SDGs are to encourage development by improving social and economic conditions in the world's poorest countries. It is based on the assertion that every individual has the right to dignity, freedom, equality, a basic standard of living that includes freedom from hunger and violence and encourages tolerance and solidarity. The MDGs and SDGs focus on three major areas of human development; bolstering human capital, improving infrastructure, and increasing social, economic, and political rights with the majority of the focus going towards increasing basic standards of living (United Nations Development Programme, 2017).

The objectives chosen within the human capital focus include improving nutrition, healthcare (including reducing levels of child mortality, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, and increasing reproductive health), and education. For the infrastructure focus, the objectives include improving infrastructure through increasing access to safe drinking water, energy, and modern information/communications technology; amplifying farm outputs through sustainable practices; improving transportation infrastructure; and preserving the environment. Lastly, for the social, economic and political rights focus, the objectives include empowering women, reducing violence, increasing political voice, ensuring equal access to public services, and increasing the security of property rights. Added later was the goal of securing local resources and the environment for future generations. The goals chosen were intended to increase human capabilities and advance the means to a productive life. The MDGs also emphasize the role of developed countries in aiding developing countries.

The Indonesian government was initially less committed to the MDGs to eradicate poverty and the fostering of human development at the grassroots level. In 2006, however, the Indonesian parliament ratified, and the president endorsed the MDGs, committing the country to the principle that development must be people-centered, i.e., that development should be for the people and done by the people (Jakarta Tempo, October 2006). In 2010 the President of Indonesia reaffirmed his country's commitment to the achievement of the SDGs. He called for development with justice and justice for all, that was pro-people, that was predicated on the principles and objectives of the SDGs, and that aimed at reducing family poverty through community empowerment and the promotion of micro and small-scale industries (Bappenas, 2010).

Why a Paradigm Shift is Necessary

The Indonesian Government has allocated billions of rupiah for infrastructure, health, agriculture, family planning, education, etc. It has made special grants and food programs available to millions of individuals in the hope that poverty could be alleviated, if not completely eliminated, by making money and food easily available to those who are poor. Yet despite these charitable efforts, the gap between rich and poor increases and the number of people living in abject poverty grows.

One of the reasons that much of the government's intended good works do not succeed and/or do not reach their intended beneficiaries is due to a lack of coordination at the lowest levels of government – the community – for coordinating and integrating the separate flows of development resources coming from so many sources and for harnessing them for more effective and efficient use as observed at the beginning of the BKKBN program in the early 1970s (BKKBN, 1972; Damandiri Foundation, 2005)

In addition to the lack of coordination of development resources, failure to alter the impact of development is also partly a function of the fact that development has traditionally been a top-down approach that treats the beneficiaries of such assistance as passive recipients. Individuals and communities have played little or no active role in defining or addressing their own development needs and priorities. Consequently, development planners at the top end of the process have tended to formulate programs which *they* think satisfy the needs of the people or, in some cases, enrich themselves. The actual needs of the people are nowhere reflected in the development process. Thus, development resources are ineffectively utilized, are subject to misuse and abuse, and very often do not benefit those actually in need (Suyono, 2007; Suyono & Parsons, 2020, p.10).

A Proposed New Approach to Development

In response to these shortcomings and building on the unique success of the Indonesian national family planning program, a new model for development has emerged under the auspices of the Damandiri Foundation, an NGO providing services to communities in the country. It mobilized no less than 450 universities in these community development activities along with local governments, various civic organizations, and financial institutions. It was based on the Pancasila principle and the 1945 Constitution, which emphasized the concept that the community works together to improve welfare in accordance with the traditional principle of gotong royong, social partnership (Meiriki, 2019, pp. 795-797).

The Posdaya, or Family Empowerment Post, is an informal community communication forum that strives to empower all members of the community – young and old, rich and poor, men and women – to improve their capacity to become actively involved in integrating the use of all available resources, both public and private, to improve the lives of all individuals in the community. Utilizing the basic goals of the MDGs, the students from the participating universities provide community services, help establish family empowerment posts (Posdaya) in the villages as family gathering places, jointly perform community activities with community volunteers, and learn how to develop and implement the MDG programs. The village families, through Posdaya forums, are encouraged to meet the requirements of the MDG indicators, e.g. that each family sends their children to school so that someday they will be better able to eradicate poverty. Every wife should be able to work outside the home so that so that the family has an additional income, thus improving family revenue. The village families are also encouraged to take care of the environment so that their children can take advantage of sustainable environmental development of the existing farmland, which can continue to be used for farming or other purposes (Damandiri Foundation, 2005; Suyono, 2009).

The Posdaya is an approach to development which recognizes and promotes the notion that development is multifaceted and is greater than the sum of its parts. In other words, it is more than just discrete inputs by various sectors, be they health, education, cooperatives, and the like. Rather it is through the synergies and the permutations and combinations of the various inputs that bring about higher levels of achievement than would be accomplished by the sum of the single inputs on their own (Suyono, 2009).

While the Indonesian government's effort to achieve MDGs was through the use of formal local administrative structures and local officials, the university students and community leaders were developing the Posdaya, designed to empower all family members and provide a regular opportunity for all community members to discuss, plan, and decide on activities that would benefit all members of the community, especially the family unit. These posts could be community based, faith based, or even functionally based. For example, religious institutions and religious leaders formed a Posdaya to deliberate on community development needs and programs. Farmers could form a Posdaya to foster their particular agricultural or livestock needs from the community perspective. Underlying each, though, is the development of a vehicle for the delivery of integrated family services, encompassing family health, education, training, and micro-enterprise support. It was also an agent for promoting environmental awareness and a facilitator of self-sustaining family initiatives. In difficult times it promoted activities to help neighbors, especially poor families, and thus served as an effective local safety net.

The establishment and development of the Posdaya was handled by individuals, local community leaders, or by social organizations and their membership, such as the Family Welfare Movement (PKF), and religious-based organizations. Initiation of a Posdaya may come through action by local government structures, whether at the sub-district, village, or community level or the parallel "Banjar" system, based in Bali. They were mainly developed by university student movements to help promote development activities for Kuliah Kerja Nyata (KKN) or through Lecture and Community Activities by Students at the village levels, conducting advocacy, communication, and education training (Damandiri, 2006; Meiriki, 2019, p. 797).

Within the Posdaya model, with the assistance of the government and/or community organizations, better-off families in the community were also called upon to help less privileged families to reach their potential. Thus, the Posdaya was a community institution that was dedicated to creating a public that was more knowledgeable about what public and private sector resources were available and that dared to demand that development planners make these resources available to the community. The Posdaya became an advocacy group for families in the community to demand what had been promised to them by the government.

Perhaps more important than merely advocating for change in the way development resources were distributed and managed, the Posdaya endeavored to stimulate the creative and

dynamic, but as yet unrealized, human resource potential at the community level to work collaboratively among all sectors of the community to strengthen its viability as a basic building block of society. Thus, the Posdaya strived to promote the community, not the government, as the ultimate determinant of the success of development. It is a bottom-up approach. All segments and socioeconomic strata of the community working together, ultimately defined their own needs and how those needs can best be met. Communities did not come by this naturally; the Posdaya is a means to stimulate this understanding and to nurture its formulation. This most important quality of the Posdaya falls into the public value paradigm initially proposed by Mark H. Moore of Harvard University since the development activities were based on the needs identified and agreed to by the families involved in the Posdaya (Moore, 1995; Public Value, 2020).

Family Empowerment through Posdaya; Practical Steps

The abundant potential of the village is evident. Since 2000, the Damandiri Foundation, in cooperation with universities and other NGOs and public organizations, and in line with the government implementation of MDGs, developed activities for university faculty and students and members of NGO and community organizations. The goal was to help empower families at the village level through the Kuliah Kerja Nyata (KKN), the family empowerment movement in the village, by sending university students and faculty members and other volunteers to work with community members in the villages. These activities are multifaceted.

The first task was for the Damandiri Foundation to train university students to gain knowledge of the potential of each village. This required cooperating with and being sympathetic to the community in order to gain data and information on the community. This would help determine the natural potential of the economic value of certain areas, as well as getting the community's permission to help formulate, together with villagers, the common goals and activities that would be implemented by the people of the community themselves to achieve the common goals or values. Meanwhile, Damandiri Foundation staff also worked with the community to set up its Posdaya and train the key villagers to run it (Damandiri Foundation, 2005; Suyono, 2009).

Second was for the Damandiri Foundation to study the potential of the local citizens in the community, primarily those capable of helping family members to collectively identify common goals and organizing activities or develop existing potential into a profitable product from something that was providing little or no income. This research was important because the activity should ultimately be undertaken by people of the community while the students would act as coaches and motivators to develop and deploy potential resources in the village. This phase included the need to empower local people to be prepared to support the process of

cultivating the wealth of existing resources, including those of the village as well as civic groups, local governments, and financial institutions (Suyono, 2009, p. 15; Meiriki, 2019, p. 797).

The final step was to help the family members of the community to identify, through discussions, their common goals or public values and to help the production and marketing of viable products based on the agreed upon goals. The university students were also expected to teach people to support the products that were ready for sale. Students and volunteers working in the villages were to motivate village families, especially the young, by encouraging attitudinal changes from "lazy" attitudes and behaviors into an effective "corporate" behavior and to appreciate time as one of the most valuable commodities (Damandiri Foundation, 2005).

In the process of developing family cohesion through Posdaya in a community, there was a need to eliminate negative family functional values. For example, the community helped a family whose house condition did not meet the health requirements. They might assist in repairing the house with the improvement of the floor so that the family's young child would have a floor inside instead of dirt. A family without a toilet could be assisted by providing lavatory facilities. A family who was eating only one meal a day could be assisted to finding a job for the head of the family so that his/her family could be in a better financial condition. Families who had inadequate clothing would be assisted by donations or work opportunities so that they could become more comfortable financially and socially. The families whose children were not being schooled could be helped so that their children would be able to go to school with the help of the community through the Posdaya-initiated activities. (Suyono, 2009, p. 18)

The process of empowerment through the Posdaya program was aimed ultimately to improve MDG/SDG indicators of the families, which would have an influence on the ability of the families to escape from poverty. It was also aimed to encourage those families achieving better socio-economic goals to help other unfortunate community members to improve their lives.

Results/Accomplishments

The Posdaya program was started in 2000 by a non-profit NGO, the Damandiri Foundation, and by the end of 2007 it helped generate about 1,800 Posdayas. By 2014, the Posdaya program was extended to almost 60,000 villages in 34 provinces in Indonesia and has reached most of the families in these villages. It has helped uplift the spirit of these villages and improved socio-economic conditions of about 13.6 million families. The program is growing and has been instrumental in changing the paradigm to achieve the MDGs and SDGs in Indonesia. More and more people have recognized that the family can be the basic organizational unit for such developmental achievement. The bottom-up approach, not the top-down approach, is the key to attaining the global developmental goals in Indonesia (Muljono et al., 2019, p. 70; Damandiri Foundation, 2014).

The expansion of the Posdaya system has benefited greatly by the mobilization of the Damandiri Foundation for technical assistance to the villages. This was based on the development philosophy of the Foundation that everyone can contribute to development, especially at the local level, using the social science and technical capacity of the universities. In the initial stage of the Posdaya program, only a limited number of universities were involved, including Bogor Agricultural University, Ibnu Khaldun University, Pakuan University, and Djuanda University. By 2014, however, more than 450 universities were participating in the Posdaya program to provide technical assistance in the formation and management of local Posdayas in identifying the common issues as well as the means to solve them. (Damandiri Foundation, 2014; Sadano et al., 2017, p. 14).

According to an evaluative study focusing on West Java alone, over 90 percent of the village Posdayas it studied were organizationally viable (33%) or strong (60%). Less than 20 percent needed further management assistance to undertake useful projects in their villages (Muljono, 2019, pp. 75-79). Another study found that the assistance, especially technical support given by the universities to the village Posdayas, has been quite useful for the implementation and execution of the village Posdaya programs when such assistance could be no longer continued. (Sadano et al., 2017, pp. 17-19).

While the Posdaya program was initiated to demonstrate the viability of the new bottom-up development approach in the villages, in 2015 the government introduced a special village development program by providing every village with a special budget directly from the central government. These are village development programs with a substantial “Dana Desa” (Village Fund) to be provided to the head of every village for infrastructure development and other community efforts. The program is coordinated by the new Ministry of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration (Kemendesa).

In view of this increasing involvement of the central government in the developmental activities at the village level to avoid possible duplication and conflict in the village, Damandiri felt that its mission to promote the concept of popular participation in developmental activities and its support for the Posdaya activities could be discontinued. Some Posdayas joined the village development programs while others continued with their own funding as Posdayas to sustain their community activities in social and economic endeavors.

Conclusion

The strength of a nation rests squarely on the strength of its people – men and women, young and old. Empowering the family and the community to actively and directly participate in the development process better ensures that the results of that process are people-centered and relevant. Engaging all sectors of the community in defining their development objectives or goals

and working cooperatively and contributing according to their means creates a more effective and efficient use of development resources. It also promotes a greater sense of transparency and accountability.

The Posdaya was and is a mechanism for empowering the family unit to achieve its fullest potential. It focuses on the development needs of those who tend to be the least involved. These include women whose participation in the work force has been constrained because of child rearing duties that prevent mothers from obtaining marketable skills required to contribute to the financial improvement of the family. These also include children who, for one reason or another, are forced to leave school at an early age and who, as a result, are relegated to low paying manual jobs at the margins of society. Further, these include the older generation who tend to be sidelined because they have retired from their primary occupations but who still retain relevant knowledge and skills which, if properly harnessed and channeled, can contribute substantially to the welfare of the family and community.

There is really nothing new in what the Posdaya does. Rather it is the perspective that is different. It seeks to mobilize and utilize all of the human and financial resources that now exist at the community level and those that are being provided from outside to work collaboratively for the improvement of all. It seeks to move from the charity approach, which now characterizes so much government development assistance and which has been proven to fall short of its objectives, with a new family dynamic in which the capacities of all members of the family are strengthened and contribute to the advancement of both the family and the community which has become the common value.

It is precisely the Posdaya's simplicity and no-nonsense approach to development that has attracted the interest and support of those working at the grassroots level. Initially, just a handful of district and sub-district officers in places like Pacitan in East Java saw the potential of the Posdaya model and put their support behind it. In 2015, many villages in most provinces signed memoranda of understanding to fully support the expansion of the Posdaya throughout their districts and sub-districts. A total of over 60,000 Posdaya have been established. A total of 450 state and private universities have been enlisted to promote, monitor, and evaluate the program and many students have signed up to do their voluntary community service working with the Posdayas.

The Posdaya, like its predecessor the Pos KB (village family planning post) which contributed so remarkably to the success of the national family planning program's drive to make family planning a village initiative, holds the same promise and potential for making development truly a people-oriented and -driven process. This, in turn, will better ensure that families and communities are empowered to look after their own interests which will contribute directly to the achievement of the MDGs.

In 2015 the government initiated Village Development Programs (VDP) for almost 75,000 villages in the country. By then, the MDGs had evolved into new SDG guidelines. Considering these new programs, the new management of the Damandiri Foundation decided that its mission to help develop the local community through the Posdaya program had been accomplished. The hoped that the many government programs through VDP would be sufficient to help empower people and support programs to reduce poverty in the country. Many of the Posdaya leaders continued their activities with the new government programs, but many others continued with the Posdaya development in their own villages with local community support. One can say the spirit of the Posdaya lives on.

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