The Role of Communication in Overcoming Cultural Barriers in the Empowerment Program for Indigenous Papuans

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Abstract

This study explores the critical role of communication in overcoming cultural barriers in the empowerment program for Indigenous Papuans in Teluk Bintuni District. Effective conflict management and empowerment require a multifaceted communication strategy that engages community participation and fosters holistic development. Key strategies identified include enhancing stakeholder communication, adopting inclusive approaches, and implementing appropriate regulations. The presence of large companies often exacerbates conflicts due to differing perceptions, highlighting the need for effective communication models between the government, adat leaders, and the community. Education and empowerment programs, grounded in accurate data and involving community leaders, are essential for addressing the root causes of conflict and improving welfare. Effective communication is crucial for enhancing community understanding of development goals and how they can contribute to and benefit from these processes. This study underscores the importance of a synergistic communication model that integrates training, mentoring, financial support, and regulatory frameworks to foster independence, reduce poverty, and ensure sustainable development. The study also highlights the necessity of involving all stakeholders in coordinated efforts to drive the successful empowerment of Indigenous Papuans, ensuring that development initiatives align with local needs and cultural contexts.

Keywords: *Communication Strategies, Indigenous Papuans, Empowerment Programs, Conflict Management.*

INTRODUCTION

Community empowerment is a crucial process that enables individuals and groups within a community to gain more control over their lives. This process focuses on capacity building and resource development, empowering communities to meet their own needs and address challenges they face.

Communities that are underdeveloped, disadvantaged, or impoverished often provide fertile ground for conflict (Nwokolo 2013, Birkmann et al 2022). Such conditions can exacerbate social instability and increase the risk of violence and criminality. For instance, high crime rates and social welfare issues in certain areas can fuel the rise of separatist movements (Moghadam 2020, Suntana & Tresnawaty 2021, Balcells et al 2021), as seen with the Armed Criminal Groups (KKB) in the provinces of Papua and West Papua. Economic disparities and limited access to basic services often breed deep-seated dissatisfaction and marginalization, which can evolve into armed movements. Therefore, addressing poverty and empowering communities is not just about improving well-being, but also a critical step in building stability and preventing conflict (Ansari et al 2012, Crisp et al 2016, Eilertsen 2023).

Teluk Bintuni District, with its abundant natural resources, holds significant potential as an investment hub that could spur regional development. In this context, utilizing an effective and appropriate communication model is key to ensuring that development is not solely focused on the exploitation of natural resources, but also on enhancing the welfare and competitiveness of local human resources.

An effective communication model in community empowerment is essential for achieving development that prioritizes welfare (Melkote & Steeves 2015, Djafar et al 2019, Yustikasari et al 2021). Effective communication plays a crucial role in enhancing community understanding of development goals and how they can contribute

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to and benefit from the process. With clear and inclusive communication, communities become more aware of the importance of the quality and competitiveness of human resources on both national and global scales.

The dialogue and execution of community empowerment initiatives in Teluk Bintuni District have broadened, culminating in the creation of the Bio Bintuni canned food industry and extending to formerly remote regions like North Moskona District and East Moskona District, along with a range of economic and social infrastructures such as marketplaces, suitable housing, medical facilities, and tuition-free education of international standards offered by Harmoni School Terpadu (HST) and other state schools. Despite these developments, numerous Indigenous Papuans continue to endure distressing and marginalized living conditions due to a lack of empowerment. This predicament necessitates a communication model equipped with specific strategic measures aimed at advancing the development of Indigenous Papuans through empowerment programs, particularly those that enhance economic growth.

Various obstacles have impeded the effectiveness of these empowerment initiatives specifically designed for Indigenous Papuans in Teluk Bintuni District: The communication strategy employed in the deployment of empowerment programs has not been sufficiently customized for Indigenous Papuans, leading to a widespread misunderstanding of the program's objectives and direction within the community. Additionally, the involvement of opinion leaders in deepening the community's comprehension of the empowerment efforts, particularly in terms of economic development for Indigenous Papuans, remains underutilized. There is a noticeable absence of strategic steps or phases designed to facilitate the welfare of Indigenous Papuans. Training and mentoring initiatives focusing on economic development for this community are scant. Furthermore, there is an inadequate provision of spaces and support for financing, along with the marketing of products and services by Indigenous Papuans. The exploration and exploitation of local resources in areas inhabited by Indigenous Papuans have not been effectively managed, which often results in social envy and continued marginalization. The initiatives aimed at altering mindsets towards the growth and empowerment of Indigenous Papuans have not reached their full potential. Lastly, the use of communication as a method for addressing these issues has been lacking, contributing to various disputes, especially notable in the Teluk Bintuni District.

The problems highlighted in the Teluk Bintuni District of Papua indicate that Indigenous Papuans continue to be disempowered. This issue stems from the perception among Indigenous Papuans that their region lags behind other parts of Indonesia, despite the presence of plentiful natural resources like oil, natural gas, coal, timber, and forest fish. Although these resources are managed by the state, they have not successfully empowered the Indigenous Papuan communities.

Various groups within the Papuan community consistently emphasize these issues. In response, a strategic communication model is essential for planning and executing cross-sectoral community empowerment initiatives (Willis et al 2016, Schiavo 2020, Marín-González et al 2022). To facilitate these efforts, the government enacted the Teluk Bintuni District Regulation No. 52 of 2016. This regulation defines the position, organizational structure, duties, functions, and operational procedures of the Office of Community and Village Empowerment. It specifies that the head of this office supports the Regent by managing government affairs related to community and village empowerment, tasks that are within the regional jurisdiction and delegated to the local government.

According to the Medium-Term Regional Development Plan (RPJMD) of the Office of Community and Village Empowerment in Teluk Bintuni District, the office is responsible for several key functions. These include the formulation of policies within the sector of community and village empowerment, the implementation of these policies, the evaluation and reporting on initiatives within this sector, and the coordination of cross-sectoral activities related to the empowerment of communities and villages. These roles are designed to enhance the administrative and operational effectiveness of empowerment programs in the region.

METHOD

This qualitative study investigates the complex dynamics of community empowerment in Teluk Bintuni, West Papua, focusing on regions where governmental and non-governmental initiatives have targeted Indigenous Papuans. The research location is specifically chosen for its active engagement in empowerment efforts, which,

despite significant investment, continue to encounter obstacles frequently highlighted in discussions related to regional conflicts. A diverse group of informants has been selected, including government officials, religious and traditional leaders, women, youth representatives, and locals affected by or participating in these conflicts. Key participants include members from the West Papua MRP, Teluk Bintuni government, clergy, and various community organization leaders.

Data collection will utilize both primary and secondary sources. Primary data will be gathered through direct interviews with Indigenous Papuans and field observations, providing immediate insights into the local conditions and perceptions. Secondary data will consist of literature reviews that offer a broader contextual understanding and validate the primary data findings.

The methodology adheres to Creswell's phenomenological approach, emphasizing in-depth interviews, self-reflection, and depictions of external realities to form a detailed picture of the empowerment environment. This methodical collection and analysis involve phases of data reduction, presentation, and synthesis, aiming to draw conclusions that enhance our comprehension of the persistent challenges and identify viable solutions for community empowerment in Teluk Bintuni.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Development Communication Theory

According to Cangara (2020) in his book on Development Communication, empowerment is defined in the context of sustainable development in several different ways, including Narayan's definition: "Empowerment is the expansion of the poor's assets and capabilities to participate, negotiate, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives." Further, Cangara (2020: 347-382) identifies ten communication models for development:

Two-Step and Multistep Communication Model.

Diminishing Traditional Society Communication Model.

Dialogic Communication Model.

Diffusion of Innovations Communication Model.

AIDDA Communication Model (Awareness, Interest, Desire, Decision, Action).

ACDC Communication Model (Appropriate Communication for Development of Communities), known as appropriate communication.

KAP-Based Change Communication Model (Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice).

Advocacy Communication Model, strategic action communication to create public policies that benefit the community or prevent detrimental policies.

Social Marketing Communication Model, aimed at raising public awareness about issues affecting many people.

Social Mobilization Communication Model, a broad communication movement to engage community participation in achieving specific developmental goals through self-directed efforts.

Community Empowerment

Today, there are many nuances in understanding the concept of empowerment in development. The concept of empowerment is seen as an effort to find an ideal development model after various previous development paradigms failed to meet the expectations of most of humanity. According to Friedman (1992), the empowerment concept represents the last paradigm in the development of human concepts, arising from two main issues: failure and hope. Specifically, it addresses the failure of economic development models to tackle poverty and the hope for alternative developments that incorporate values of democracy and economic growth.

Communication and Empowerment

In its implementation, Narayan (2002) points out that enhancing a community's empowerment is supported by access to communication. Communication is a means for communities to gain access to power and opportunities, facilitating a more engaged and influential role in shaping their environments and futures.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In the context of conflict management through the empowerment program for the Indigenous Papuans in Teluk Bintuni District, Cangara (2020) identified the use of the social mobilization communication model as one of the effective approaches. This model is a large-scale communication movement aimed at engaging community participation in achieving specific development goals through self-driven efforts. The study described includes several concepts of conflict management in this empowerment program.

Communication and Regulation of Indigenous Papuan Empowerment

The approach to addressing conflicts and strengthening the empowerment process of Indigenous Papuans in Teluk Bintuni District highlights several critical aspects essential for the success of this initiative. Three main strategies have been implemented, including enhancing communication among stakeholders, adopting a holistic and inclusive approach, and implementing appropriate regulations.

Communication among stakeholders is considered vital to address injustices in empowerment, which often serve as sources of conflict. This strategy involves coordination and regular meetings to ensure all voices are heard and the solutions generated are acceptable to all parties. This approach not only strengthens dialogue but also helps build trust and transparency among various groups in Papua.

The holistic and inclusive approach emphasizes the importance of involving all stakeholders, including government and indigenous community institutions, in dialogue and policy-making. This is crucial to addressing the root causes of issues and ensuring that the solutions developed not only come from top-down approaches but also consider local wisdom and the specific needs of affected communities.

Appropriate regulations are crucial to creating a framework that supports effective empowerment, especially among Indigenous Papuan women. Well-designed regulations should take into account the unique social and cultural contexts in Papua and be designed to maximize benefits for the community while minimizing potential conflicts or misuse.

Communication and Investment as Issues in Indigenous Papuan Life

Issues in Papua have become an integral part of community life, demanding efforts to rise and take control in their own land. The presence of large companies in Teluk Bintuni District, such as BP Tangguh, Genting Oil, and Faritas Maju Tama, has not yet significantly impacted the progress of local communities. Instead, it has triggered conflicts due to differing perceptions among the government, companies, and communities regarding the benefits of investments. To address these issues, an effective communication model is needed between the government, traditional leaders, and the community to resolve various demands and conflicts through Indigenous Papuan empowerment programs, including the enhancement of Human Resources (HR). High-quality HR is expected to improve welfare and reduce conflicts arising from unemployment and lack of skills. Traditional leaders should actively assist the government in development for community welfare, with a commitment to mutual oversight to prevent conflicts. The root of issues in Papua often stems from welfare issues, which remain unresolved despite the presence of large companies. Therefore, the importance of community-involved communication in development is expected to improve central government policies, so that Papua communities feel part of the Indonesian nation.

Education Communication and Indigenous Papuan Progress

Issues in Papua revolve around opportunities and bias towards local communities. Education becomes a priority to open opportunities for Papuan communities, as limited knowledge can lead to issues in natural resource management. Aspirations and efforts for progress should be voiced through traditional institutions,

enabling traditional leaders to communicate with the government to develop empowerment programs for Indigenous Papuans as a resolution to conflicts and disparities. The primary issue in Teluk Bintuni District is the lack of empowerment among indigenous Papuan communities. Therefore, the recommended solution is to empower them in various aspects of life, especially economically, politically, and legally. Empowerment programs should be based on community needs data obtained through tripartite or three-way communication, then implemented by respective technical agencies. Communication with indigenous communities is crucial in developing community empowerment programs, including the use of village funds and the allocation of village funds that need to be effectively communicated to address issues of unemployment and lack of effective empowerment.

Central and Regional Communication for Conflict Resolution

Conflicts in Papua, including in Teluk Bintuni District, hinder development and result in casualties due to the lack of justice and insufficient dialogue between the central government and the community through traditional leaders. The government needs to listen to the aspirations of the Papuan people to understand their governance and empowerment needs, enabling development based on real needs. Resolving conflicts in Papua should focus on welfare, not violence. Communication between traditional leaders or community leaders and the government is crucial to advancing Papuan communities. Community aspirations are typically conveyed through community leaders or traditional figures, as issues in Papua are often resolved through traditional means. Therefore, the development of community empowerment programs needs to involve traditional leaders. Communication between the government and traditional leaders as representatives of the community is essential to align programs with community desires and capabilities. Traditional leaders or community leaders play a vital role in conveying programs to the community in a traditional manner, ensuring that the programs are well understood and accepted.

Communication for Mentoring and Assistance of Indigenous Papuans

Empowering the Papuan people requires mentoring, training, assistance, and capital provision to prevent the backwardness that has triggered issues leading to national disintegration. Central and regional government aid, such as direct cash transfers, has been functioning well, but what is needed more is the self-reliance of Papuans with high competitiveness. Therefore, effective communication between the central government, local government, and traditional leaders is essential, which is then conveyed to the community so that they can actively participate in development. Effective communication and the implementation of empowerment programs can realize a prosperous, harmonious, and peaceful community life in Teluk Bintuni District.

The government has been empowering communities through the Community Empowerment Agency, supported by various agencies according to their respective duties and functions, to achieve advanced and independent Papuans, including in business by providing special capital assistance for Indigenous Papuans (OAP). Labor-intensive activities, training, and other programs have been implemented, but it is important that program development is based on valid data to ensure that implementation truly benefits the community. Empowerment of indigenous Papuans conducted by the government aligns with the vision and mission of the regional head for the periods 2016-2021 and 2021-2024. Full support from the Regional Head enables empowerment strategies through sustainable development of creative economy to proceed effectively (Ioppolo et al, 2016)

Effective Communication for Empowering Indigenous Papuans (OAP)

Coordination and consolidation with the Budget Team of the Teluk Bintuni District Government aim to receive input and obtain support to empower Indigenous Papuans (OAP) as a concrete step in conflict resolution. Effective cross-sectoral communication is crucial because empowerment efforts have been suboptimal due to lack of mentoring, business capital, inadequate integration of training, capital assistance, marketing, and regulatory framework guidance for investors and governments. Input from various stakeholders emphasizes that good communication between the government and traditional leaders is essential in developing effective empowerment programs. The economic potential in Teluk Bintuni District remains underutilized due to unfocused and poorly coordinated programs.

A synergistic communication model is expected to address backwardness and improve community welfare, particularly in light of persistently high poverty rates (Singh & Chudasama 2020, Soundararajan et al 2024). Government efforts such as the Family Hope Program (PKH) and Non-Cash Food Assistance have not significantly reduced poverty due to insufficient synergy among government programs. Empowerment communication involving all components of indigenous communities is necessary to enhance the welfare of Indigenous Papuans. Many of them are involved in agriculture, yet their welfare remains low. An integrated team involving all components of indigenous communities is expected to effectively empower them.

The self-reliance of Indigenous Papuans must be enhanced through training, mentoring, and business capital assistance, with crucial cooperation between government agencies and other stakeholders. Existing empowerment programs often fail due to poor financial management among Papua's indigenous communities. Empowerment innovations equipped with Marketing Clinics and Financial Management are expected to help them become more productive and manage finances more effectively.

Communication in Conflict Management

Institutional communication in the empowerment strategy for Indigenous Papuans (OAP) through a conflict management communication model encompasses several crucial aspects. First, the structuring of communication and coordination is necessary for the formation of a team involving relevant local government agencies (OPDs), academics, associations, and business entities for the empowerment of OAP. Second, enhancing public services through communication includes training, mentoring, and providing business capital to OAP, both in the form of SMEs and individuals. The focus of empowerment is to improve the quality of life and welfare of OAP.

Based on the conditions and opinions of the community in Teluk Bintuni District, many OAP still live in villages with concerning conditions and are marginalized from development. Therefore, it is important to identify the root causes of the issues and determine the appropriate communication model. Short-term expected outcomes include key outputs to achieve long-term goals. Communication outputs for conflict management and empowerment of OAP include improving coordination and effective public services, as well as economic empowerment through training and business capital.

CONCLUSION

Effective conflict management and empowerment of Indigenous Papuans in Teluk Bintuni District necessitate a multifaceted approach involving enhanced communication and appropriate regulation. Key strategies include fostering regular communication among stakeholders, adopting holistic and inclusive approaches, and implementing well-designed regulations to address local needs. The presence of large companies has often exacerbated conflicts due to differing perceptions, underscoring the need for effective communication models between the government, adat leaders, and the community to align development goals. Education and empowerment programs, grounded in accurate data and involving community leaders, are vital for addressing the root causes of conflict and improving welfare. Collaborative communication and coordinated efforts among all stakeholders can drive the successful empowerment of Indigenous Papuans, fostering independence and reducing poverty. Overall, a synergistic communication model that integrates training, mentoring, financial support, and regulatory frameworks is essential for sustainable development and conflict resolution in the region.

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