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Participatory Empowerment Communication in Community-Based Social Welfare

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ABSTRACT

Community-Based Social Welfare (WKSBM) serves as a mechanism to address social issues at the grassroots level through active community participation. This initiative aims to foster a sense of responsibility, enabling individuals and communities to identify and develop their potential and creativity. Communication is essential in the empowerment process, as communication activities may not always proceed smoothly or yield the desired outcomes. This study seeks to examine the participatory empowerment communication strategy within the Community-Based Social Welfare Program (WKSBM) in Magelang City. The research employed a case study methodology, with data collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document studies. Research participants included representatives from social services, social workers, community-based social welfare forums (WKSBM), sub-districts, and the community. The research data were analyzed through three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The study's findings indicate that the participatory empowerment communication strategy encompasses several communication elements: 1) multiple actors in WKSBM empowerment, including the Magelang City Social Service, Magelang City Social Workers, Villages, and WKSBM Administrators; 2) messages conveyed both verbally and non-verbally, with language style and usage tailored to the audience; 3) media utilized, such as face-to-face interactions or WhatsApp; 4) the audience, comprising the general public starting from the neighbourhood level (RT/RW); and 5) the effect, evidenced by funds collected during the Covid-19 pandemic for vulnerable communities.

INTRODUCTION

The Magelang City Government is actively addressing social issues by enhancing the welfare of its citizens. A key initiative in this effort is the implementation of the Community-Based Social Welfare (WKSBM) program. The WKSBM is a collaborative system involving social service units within a community, comprising group efforts, institutions, and their supporting networks. These social service units include community groups or local social institutions at the grassroots level in neighbourhood (RT/RW)/village/nagari/banjar areas, whether naturally occurring, traditional, or deliberately formed (Suyanto, 2006).

According to Kuntjorowati (2019), WKSBM aims to address various social problems within society. The program encourages community involvement in enhancing

social welfare, community resilience, social solidarity, and the development of networks. Suparjan and Suyanto (2003) emphasize that participation enables program beneficiaries to take responsibility for the sustainability of self-empowerment and community development, while also tapping into the potential and creativity of the surrounding community. Winarni (1998) highlights that development and strengthening of potential or capabilities are essential to achieving the independence that is the ultimate goal of empowerment.

Empowerment is the outcome of a process in which the community or target audience determines their course of action based on reflection on the challenges faced (Cornish & Dunn, 2009; Tufte & Mefalopulos, 2009), including the direction and participants involved (Waisbord, 2008). Empowerment encompasses several approaches, notably participatory methods. Consequently, community participation in the empowerment process is crucial, as the community benefits from the results. It further explore the community's potential and creativity, fostering activities oriented towards competence and social responsibility. In efforts to address various social issues and enhance welfare, the community is positioned as a central subject, ensuring genuine involvement and reducing gaps, dependency, and continuity concerns (Syarah & Rahmawati, 2017).

The effectiveness of community empowerment is largely contingent upon the quality of communication within the community. It is vital because the successful implementation of policies and programs necessitates a shared understanding between policymakers and the community as recipients. As articulated by Fisher (in Arifin, 1994), communication is invariably intertwined with social issues. The statement *"The villager can't eat communication". Communication does not satisfy the community* (Kamlongera in Hemer & Tufte, 2005. It implies that although communication is crucial, it alone cannot resolve developmental challenges. Nevertheless, its role is significant in supporting the development process, often referred to as development communication (Ramadhani & Prihantoro, 2020) or participatory communication (Waisbord, 2005).

Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009) define participatory communication as a dialogue-based approach that enables individuals to exchange information, perceptions, and opinions, thereby facilitating empowerment. According to Nurdin (Ramadhani & Prihantoro, 2020), in the context of planning or management to achieve specific objectives, a participatory communication strategy can be described as an activity plan that fosters ongoing interpersonal dialogue among all stakeholders (Cadiz, 2005; Waisbord, 2008; Cornish & Dunn, 2009) concerning developmental issues or goals. This process is rooted in participatory practices at the grassroots level (Melkote & Steeves, 2015) and involves the application of both interpersonal and media communication (Waisbord, 2008), with the aim of developing and implementing a series of activities that contribute to solutions, realizations, and support for program initiatives (Cadiz, 2005).

However, Waisbord (2008) notes that in the participatory communication process, there is a significant likelihood of unforeseen outcomes, such as dialogue results that may not align with governmental objectives or mandates. Therefore, it is imperative to consider the factors that can enhance the success of communication strategies. Basics

Oliveira (1993) outlines several essential characteristics: (1) Establishing a conducive environment for change, (2) Clearly defining behavioral objectives, (3) Identifying the target community through exploration, (4) Utilizing communication media to broaden information reach without eliminating direct communication, (5) Engaging in meticulous planning with all involved parties, and (6) Periodically collecting feedback from the target community for follow-up.

The following characteristics are essential: (8) messages and media are tailored to the conditions, needs, and preferences of the local community; (9) prioritization is determined; (10) staff training and development are aligned with needs rather than being the primary focus; (11) multimedia is utilized to complement other media; (12) decisions are disseminated to all parties to facilitate effective communication; (13) specialized skills training is provided; (14) political support for the communication system is ensured, with field implementers involved from the planning stage; and (15) there is effective coordination with all parties involved, accompanied by careful monitoring.

Furthermore, there are five key ideas related to participatory communication strategies. The first is the centrality of power in society for addressing issues, decision-making, and negotiation. The second is the integration of top-down and bottom-up communication approaches, while acknowledging the role of government. The third is the use of communication tools tailored to address problems and priorities for enhancing community quality of life. The fourth is the collaboration between interpersonal and mass communication, as both complement each other in terms of reach and impact. The fifth is the combination of individual and environmental factors, as they are interrelated and mutually influential (Waisbord, 2005).

Communication is recognized as an instrument that aids development programs in achieving specific objectives, particularly through information dissemination. Communication in empowerment is a deliberate and systematic process, akin to a diversity framework, where no single approach, strategy, or communication channel is deemed best for community empowerment. It is a process, not merely a technique (Cadiz, 2005). Communication serves as a societal construct, not merely the transmission of information (Waisbord, 2005). The aim of communication in community empowerment is to enhance motivation and provide opportunities for the community. A crucial aspect of communication in empowerment is to prioritize listening and facilitating dialogue over merely conveying information, and to emphasize collaborative learning rather than instructing others (Melkote & Steeves, 2015). Fundamentally, empowerment necessitates understanding, empathy, and cooperation (Melkote & Steeves, 2015). Therefore, it is imperative to continuously cultivate and reinforce values within the target community group. The objective is not only to implement the program but also to foster awareness (Rogers & Singhal, 2003) and a sense of responsibility for its sustainability.

Achieving this objective necessitates the establishment of diverse communication channels. Consequently, individuals' lives are enhanced through the development and refinement of skills, with the community positioned as an active stakeholder. As a result, communication strategies for community empowerment have garnered significant attention. Hamad (in Tahoba, 2011) emphasized that communication should not be

underestimated, nor should it be assumed to proceed without challenges when conveying messages. In disseminating messages within society, the actors must employ appropriate communication approaches to attain the desired outcomes.

Research conducted by Harlinawati and Ambardi (2014), Syarah and Rahmawati (2017), Riyanto et al. (2018), and Frederick and Lee (2019) has demonstrated that communication strategies are pivotal in the empowerment process, particularly in conveying information and ensuring program success. Participatory communication is frequently utilized in empowerment initiatives (Servaes & Malikhao, 2005; Morris, 2005; Tufte & Mefalopulos, 2009; Chepngetich, 2017). Therefore, this study concentrates on 1) participatory empowerment communication strategies within the Community-Based Social Welfare (WKSBM) program in Magelang City. The findings of this study are expected to serve as evaluative material for the program's sustainability in future years or as a reference for implementing WKSBM in other contexts.

METHOD

The research was conducted in Magelang City due to its implementation of the Community-Based Social Welfare (WKSBM) program. A qualitative approach was employed in this study, utilizing a case study method. It is aimed at identifying and understanding (VanderStoep & Johnston, 2009) the participatory empowerment communication strategy within the Community-Based Social Welfare (WKSBM) program in Magelang City. This research strategy involves a thorough investigation of an event, program, process, and group or individual activities (Newsome, 2016). The study is a descriptive case study

The data obtained from both primary and secondary data (Sugiyono, 2017). The primary data collected from interview and observation, meanwhile the secondary data is obtained from various media that supplement primary data, such as literature, books, program documents, and articles related to the research (Brodsky et al., 2016). The informants for this study were drawn from social services, social workers, members of the Community-Based Social Welfare Forum (WKSBM), sub-districts, and communities. In summary, the data collection and analysis process is outlined as follows:

Figure 1. Data Collection and Analysis Flow
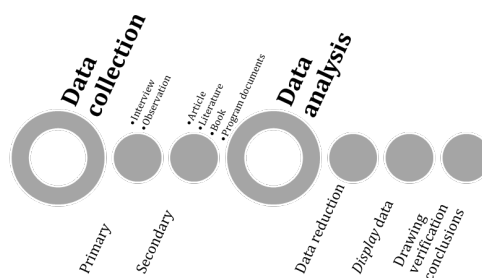
Source: Personal documents (2020)

The data collection process is intrinsically linked to the data analysis process. Initially obtained data is analyzed to facilitate the collection of additional data. Consequently, data collection is an integral component of data analysis. This process is iterative and continuous, aimed at achieving comprehensive insights (Rijali, 2019; Helaudin & Wijaya, 2019).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Community-Based Social Welfare (WKSBM) exemplifies the necessity for community awareness and social responsibility in actively addressing, mitigating, and resolving social issues within local environments. WKSBM represents a collaborative system in social welfare services at the grassroots level, comprising group efforts alongside networks or other supportive institutions, whether naturally evolving, traditionally established, or intentionally formed.

A fundamental principle of WKSBM is that community participation and empowerment are essential values in achieving social welfare at the grassroots level. Consequently, community empowerment and participation are pivotal to the program's sustainability. However, not all individuals are aware of their roles, necessitating ongoing community education. As noted by Rahmawati, Suryandari, and Kurniasari (2013), empowerment is a continuous process over time.

This process entails numerous challenges, requiring communication efforts to transform unawareness into awareness, reluctance into willingness, and passivity into active participation. Communication serves as a tool and method in articulating development and social change, enhancing daily life, and empowering individuals to transform their own lives and those of their communities (Waisbord, 2005). Specifically, communication informs and persuades, facilitating changes in ideas, opinions, attitudes, and behaviors (Rangkuti, 2009). Rahmawati et al. (2013) further emphasize that effective communication activities necessitate an appropriate communication strategy.

A communication strategy involves the optimal combination of all communication elements to achieve maximum objectives. According to Laswell, as cited in Kusumadinata (2015), the elements of communication are Who? Says what? In which channel? To Whom? With what effect?. These elements include the actors, message, channel, audience, and effect. Proper management of these elements is crucial, as communication strategies significantly enhance the effectiveness of empowerment communication. The following are research findings based on data gathered.

Figure 2. Communication elements of the Community-Based Social Welfare Program
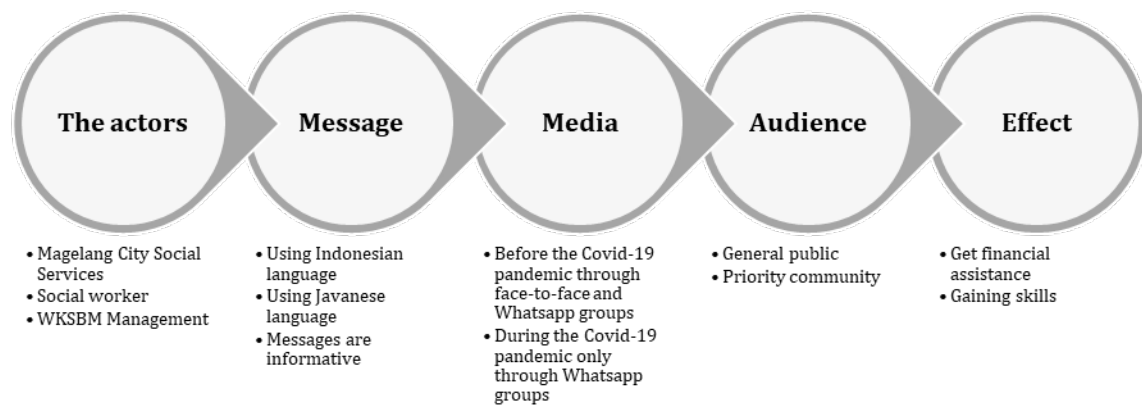
Source: Research result (2020)

The actors

The actors are entities responsible for transmitting messages (Maulida, Prawira W & Nugrahenti, 2020). In this context, the actors encompass not only individuals (Prawira W & Maulida, 2020) but also institutions. Effective actors are essential in empowerment initiatives, characterized by their commitment, enthusiasm, dedication, and active participation in communication planning and execution related to the intended program. Within the WKSBM empowerment framework, several actors are involved, including the Magelang City Social Service, Magelang City Social Workers, Villages, and WKSBM Management. These entities possess distinct roles and authorities, yet they collaborate to support one another.

The Magelang City Social Service is an institution tasked with the technical implementation and oversight of the Community-Based Social Welfare (WKSBM) program, as outlined in the Decree of the Minister of Social Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia Number: 42/HUK/2004, which provides guidelines for the implementation of WKSBM empowerment, specifically in Chapter IV, Article 7, concerning the Implementation Mechanism. In this regard, the city social service is authorized to conduct social mapping, initial exploration, feasibility studies, counseling, guidance, motivation, and to provide assistance and protection while adhering to minimum service standards.

In executing its authority, the social service is supported by social workers, particularly in counseling and motivation. Additionally, in conducting social mapping, initial exploration, and feasibility studies, the social service and social workers collaborate with the sub-district to identify, map, and periodically update data, including partnership networks in each sub-district and communities vulnerable to social issues. The sub-district serves as a liaison between the social service and the community. In this capacity, the sub-district, through its empowerment sector, acts as an actor facilitating the empowerment of the WKSBM community.

The subsequent individual serving as a speaker is the WKSBM administrator. According to the interview findings and the membership decree of the Community-Based Social Welfare Forum (WKSBM) administrators in various sub-districts of Magelang City, it is evident that the administrators are led by prominent business owners within the sub-

district. This initiative aims to foster a robust partnership network, enabling those with resources to assist the less fortunate. This was demonstrated during the pandemic when large business owners in one of the sub-districts in Magelang City, who also served as administrators in the WKSBM administrator forum, invited their business partners to raise funds as a of concern and an effort to mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

This scenario aligns with one of the principles of communication strategies proposed by Nasution (in Rahmawati et al., 2013), which emphasizes the necessity of involving community agents as officers in empowerment efforts, allowing individuals to engage with their peers. Waisbord (2005) further emphasized the critical role of community networks in disseminating information, noting that community leaders can influence their members regarding new innovations. Additionally, the behavior of the leader significantly affects the level of acceptance of innovation within the social system (Mughees-Uddin, 1990).

In addition to involving influential individuals, empowerment communication strategies should incorporate opinion leaders from the target community group. The objective is to serve as a conduit for delivering empowerment messages (Rahmawati, Suryandari & Kurniasari, 2013). The interview results indicated that empowering community leaders as connectors encourages community engagement. This is consistent with Waisbord's (2005) assertion that community leaders, including religious and traditional leaders, possess advantages in reaching the population.

Furthermore, during training sessions, the neighbourhood head (RT/RW) will delegate several individuals based on specific needs, who will then disseminate their acquired knowledge to other residents. This concept, as described by Rogers (in Mughees-Uddin, 1990), is identified as a key component of communication, utilizing agents of changes from the target community to facilitate the sharing of valuable information in empowerment efforts. Consequently, the agent can produce and disseminate educational messages that are both necessary and appealing to the target community.

Message

Each individual possesses unique backgrounds and perspectives. Consequently, when conveying information, it is essential to ensure the appropriateness of the message. According to Maulida, Prawira W, and Nugrahenti (2020), a message comprises words and symbols communicated by the sender to the audience. In practice, the actors employs both verbal and non-verbal messages, tailoring the language style and usage to the audience. Mughees-Uddin (1990) asserts that messages crafted with consideration of the target's relevance, understanding, context, and perspective will enhance the reception of the information content.

In socialization contexts, the language used is Indonesian, occasionally interspersed with Javanese. Conversely, in interpersonal communication, Javanese is typically employed to foster familiarity, thereby enhancing communication effectiveness. The rationale is that individuals tend to communicate more readily with those who share similarities, increasing the likelihood of idea acceptance (Prawira W & Maulida, 2020).

Mughees-Uddin (1990) similarly notes that messages, as a component of communication strategy, are more effective when formulated with an understanding of the recipient's culture, values, and norms.

The delivery of messages is conducted with courtesy and respect, particularly when addressing elderly individuals. Therefore, clarity and precision are imperative to prevent misunderstandings. This is equally applicable to individuals resistant to change, referred to as laggards in innovation diffusion theory. Addressing this demographic necessitates a tailored approach to avoid potential issues. Strategies include personal engagement and familiarizing these individuals with new concepts (Robinson, 2009).

Furthermore, this study identified that the Covid-19 pandemic led to the suspension of empowerment activities, such as training. To address this, facilitators sought relevant and beneficial information, subsequently disseminating it via WhatsApp groups. The information was not shared directly through links but was instead copied, occasionally summarized, and divided into segments to ensure accessibility for all participants, particularly those with technological challenges. An example shared was hydroponic planting techniques. The informant noted that these efforts were significantly beneficial, not only in occupying time and alleviating isolation but also in enhancing family food security during the pandemic.

In this phase, the actors seeks to leverage and address the needs perceived by the target audience, based on the principle that individuals tend to disregard messages that do not align with their reality (Cadiz, 2005). During the pandemic, outdoor activities have been restricted, and it is highly recommended to spend more time at home. Consequently, individuals, particularly mothers, must be adept at managing the family's food and nutritional requirements. Education on hydroponic plants provides mothers with information that can serve as a solution to challenges in providing nutritious, economical, and readily accessible food.

In addition to meeting essential needs (Basics Oliveira, 1993), this activity serves as an enjoyable means to alleviate boredom at home. This aspect encourages individuals to engage and participate by practicing it firsthand. Through this direct experience, the target community gains a lasting and enriched experience that can enhance their capabilities (Cadiz, 2005). The community can also be more readily persuaded to adopt and implement the activity.

The messages conveyed are often motivational, as motivation is crucial for participatory communication to inspire individuals to act in accordance with the information and knowledge provided (Quebral, 2006). Waisbord (2008) similarly posited that community participation must always be accompanied by educational efforts to raise awareness of specific issues within the framework of empowerment. Thus, the message transcends mere information transmission, encouraging individuals to utilize their local knowledge to address problems at the grassroots level.

Media

In addition to the message, the media plays a crucial role in raising awareness and encouraging participation in empowerment initiatives. As noted by Mitu in (Maulida,

Prawira W & Nugrahenti, 2020), media serves as a conduit for transmitting messages from speakers to audiences. Interviews reveal that traditional media, such as face-to-face interactions during social gatherings, is often employed to convey messages. Selecting traditional media as a credible channel is deemed an effective strategy for reaching target audiences (Mughees-Uddin, 1990).

The utilization of communication tools as media enables individuals to access information. It is essential to tailor communication strategies to address specific issues and priorities, with the aim of enhancing community quality of life (Cadiz, 2005). Communication should be viewed not merely as an output but as a means of engaging with the community, facilitating the exchange and dissemination of knowledge and information (Cornish & Dunn, 2009).

Research findings indicate that the Covid-19 pandemic has impeded empowerment programs due to restrictions on mass gatherings. Consequently, WhatsApp has been adopted as an alternative medium. Within WhatsApp groups, sub-district companions and active residents collaborate to mobilize and coordinate efforts. This platform has proven effective for information sharing and coordination. As Adam stated in (Maulida, Prawira W & Nugrahenti, 2020), various social media platforms are invaluable for disseminating information in diverse formats (text, images, or videos) and engaging with a broad audience swiftly.

This approach aligns with the communication element in empowerment, emphasizing the use of straightforward and suitable media (Cadiz, 2005). Given the pandemic's constraints on gatherings, WhatsApp emerges as an appropriate choice, as most community members possess smartphones and utilize WhatsApp for communication. This decision facilitates a more efficient, targeted, and seamless empowerment process.

The situation exemplifies the integration of interpersonal and media communication, combining media channels with interpersonal interactions. Media, with its extensive reach, is employed to enhance public awareness and understanding of issues. Meanwhile, interpersonal communication, as a persuasive foundation for altering beliefs or attitudes, allows messages to permeate social networks and become part of daily social interactions (Cadiz, 2005). Servaes & Malikhao (2005) further assert that interpersonal communication exerts a more significant and direct influence on social behavior than mass communication.

Audience

The audience, whether an individual, group, or community, is the intended recipient of information dissemination. The target audience for the Community-Based Social Welfare (WKSBM) empowerment program encompasses the general public, beginning at the neighbourhood level (RT/RW). However, certain neighbourhood (RT/RW) criteria are prioritized for receiving empowerment programs with a greater emphasis. These criteria include areas with high poverty rates, dense populations, and regions experiencing significant unrest.

The audience plays a crucial role in the empowerment process, as the primary objective is to engage them in active participation. As articulated by Cadiz (2005), the central concept is the centrality of power. This implies that power is inherent in the notion of community empowerment, where individuals and communities are empowered by providing information on specific issues, communicating priority problems, making decisions for their own needs, and negotiating power relationships.

The audience is also regarded as users or beneficiaries, with the target community exercising control. The community is positioned to oversee and manage the programs being implemented, as the essence of empowerment is control. To enable the target community to assume a position of control, it is essential to develop community capabilities, as communication is an integral component of the development process. Training encompasses communication skills, such as community broadcasting, community or village journalism, computer skills, internet navigation, discernment regarding the relevance of information and its appropriate application, and interpersonal communication, which includes personal empowerment and the reinforcement of values.

Additionally, managerial skills such as problem-solving, decision-making, conflict resolution, and negotiation are equally important (Cadiz, 2005). Negotiation and conflict resolution skills are valuable for addressing the diverse nature of society in terms of educational background, social and economic status, age, and individual characteristics. This heterogeneity presents a challenge in efforts to engage the community. Therefore, the actors must proceed with caution and precision when conveying messages to prevent community rejection and ensure program success. Consequently, there is a need for an integration of top-down and bottom-up communication approaches.

In the realm of community development and empowerment, the government's role is of paramount importance. The government plays a crucial part in program development, as its actions, or lack thereof, can significantly impact the lives of many individuals, particularly those who are impoverished and marginalized (Cadiz, 2005). However, it is essential to recognize that communication should not be solely top-down; community feedback is vital to fostering empowerment. The successful integration of both communication approaches is instrumental in addressing issues, particularly those related to the acceptance and rejection of empowerment initiatives.

While some individuals may not yet be inclined to participate, research indicates that not all community members are resistant to engagement. There are individuals who actively seek to participate, and some even collaborate with opinion leaders to encourage other community members to join. This collective effort involves sharing resources and working together. As Cadiz (2005) elucidates, a combination of personal and environmental factors is necessary to effect behavioral and social change. The environment plays a significant role in influencing community behavior from the initiation to the maintenance phase. Therefore, understanding the audience is a critical initial step in designing a participatory empowerment communication strategy (Ananda Masar, 2014), along with selecting an appropriate actor.

Effect

The impact of empowering communication is not immediately observable but tends to develop gradually. According to Marí Sáez (2013), empowerment communication is a process rather than a product, with effects manifesting over the long term rather than the short term. This perspective considers that empowerment is not solely an individual endeavor but a collective action (Marí Sáez, 2013), emphasizing the importance of supportive empowerment communication elements and components.

In this study, several short-term outcomes of the WKSBM program are identified. These temporary outcomes include: 1) financial assistance collected by the WKSBM management for communities affected by Covid-19, which aids impacted residents, particularly the elderly, and 2) the acquisition of skills by several residents who participated in training sessions organized by various agencies, such as the education agency or the industry and trade agency. Empowerment through skills training differs from material social assistance, as it is not consumable within a short timeframe.

This training initiative aims to educate the community, as empowerment and communication extend beyond information dissemination to efforts in building local communities (Waisbord, 2008). It is anticipated that this approach will enable the exploration and development of community potential, ensuring long-term sustainability. This aligns with the characteristics necessary for a successful communication strategy, which involves providing specialized skills and prioritized training (Basics Oliveira, 1993).

Furthermore, the skills acquired from the training facilitate social interaction among individuals. Typically, after attending the training, some residents share their knowledge with others through small discussions or Family Empowerment and Welfare Movement forums (PKK). Consequently, the skills obtained from the training become accessible to other residents who did not attend. This situation fosters cooperation, thereby building an understanding of local capacity development (Melkote, 2018). Although this process is time-consuming, it necessitates consistency and empathy among individuals.

CONCLUSION

The participatory empowerment communication strategy encompasses several key elements: (1) The actors involved in WKSBM empowerment include the Magelang City Social Service, Magelang City Social Workers, Sub-districts, and WKSBM Administrators; (2) Messages, both verbal and non-verbal, are tailored in language style and usage to suit the audience; (3) Media utilized includes face-to-face interactions and WhatsApp; (4) The audience comprises the general public, starting from the neighbourhood level (RT/RW); and (5) The effects are evidenced by the funds collected during the Covid-19 pandemic for vulnerable communities. Additionally, challenges and opportunities have been identified, stemming from institutional factors, stakeholder synergy, financial resources, human resources, technological and communication advancements, and unforeseen

factors such as the virus pandemic. It is imperative that all stakeholders review and manage these aspects to ensure the smooth operation of the WKSBM program and community participation. Participation is not a quantifiable goal or a unit for temporal comparison but rather a variable of presence or absence.

For the Magelang City Government, it is essential to conduct socialization or workshops regarding the implementation mechanism of the WKSBM empowerment program to ensure a unified understanding among relevant stakeholders. This initiative aims to optimize the execution of planned programs. Furthermore, future research could explore persuasive communication strategies for engaging the community or examine community perceptions of WKSBM.

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