

Engaging While Empowering Community: A Case study of Government's Internet Access Dissemination Program to the Rural Indonesian Community

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Abstract

This research examines the implementation of Indonesian government's internet access dissemination program to Indonesian rural communities particularly to the district representativeness. The growing gap of I-poor and I-rich in most countries has brought about higher gap in people's literacy, opportunity, and economic achievement (Kagan, 2000). This has challenged Indonesia, which experiencing high disparity in telecommunication infrastructure establishment between the west and east areas, particularly rural area. Thus, the internet dissemination program aims to empower the rural community by creating information and social-economic opportunities. Given this, the paper argues that the program demands community engagement (Rogers, 1995) as community participation rights (Friedland, 2001) in socialising, exercising and benefiting internet facilities. Based on a mini-ethnography, interviews, and Forum Group Discussions (FGD), data were gathered to examine the program implementation in a district which located in the edge of Indonesian capital. This paper reports mostly on the interviews and FGD with three respondent groups: the government representatives, the internet company representatives, and the local opinion leader including communities. It revealed that the program performed exclusive engagement and empowerment—particularly students. A top-down and asymmetric communication and managerial approach was clearly an obstacle in empowering rural Indonesian community. The findings provide insights for government seeking to implement authentic sustainable community empowerment program in a developing country context.

Keywords: Community engagement, community empowerment, participation, government program, Indonesia

Introduction

This research examines the implementation of Indonesian government's internet access dissemination program that distributed to district representativeness. The growing gap of I-poor and I-rich has brought about higher disparity in people's literacy, opportunity, and economic achievement (Kagan, 2000). The growing gap of I-poor and I-rich in most countries has brought about higher gap in people's literacy, opportunity, and economic achievement (Kagan, 2000). This has challenged Indonesia, which experiencing high disparity in telecommunication infrastructure establishment between the west and east areas, particularly rural area. Thus, the program aims to empower rural community by providing internet facilities and access in rural area. Thus, the internet dissemination program aims to empower the rural community by creating information and social-economic opportunities.

Given this, community participation is a significant objective to aim the empowerment. Thus, the paper argues that the program demands community engagement (Rogers, 1995) through the proper public communication campaign (Rice & Atkin, 2001) as the community participation rights (Friedland, 2001) in socialising, exercising, and benefiting the internet facilities. However, engaging while empowering have challenged most developing countries. Particularly in government agenda, a program goal is typically government-based, yet community-based (Goddard, 2005).

The following study would first present the case study in Indonesian context. Secondly, the study identifies community engagement and power sharing in a government program. Thirdly, the relevant of community-based program would be explained. Next, the demand of public communication campaign would be addressed as major aspects in building community engagement. The viewpoint of community engagement and the research implications conclude the study.

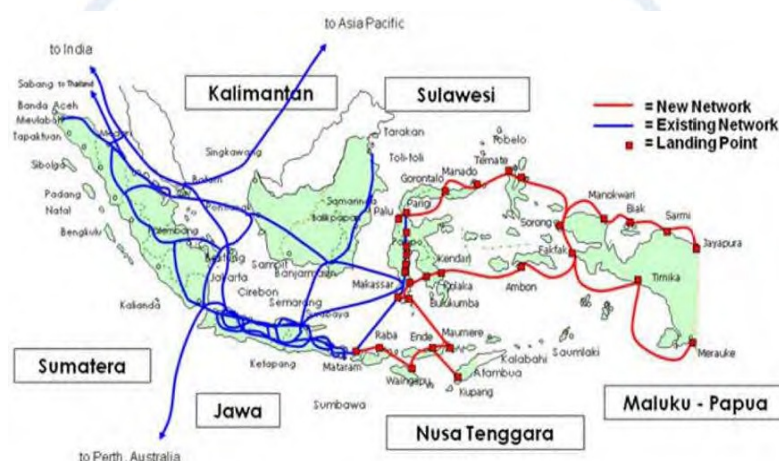
Methods

The study uses mini ethnography, semi-structured interviews, and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to develop a deep understanding of community engagement in internet distribution program. A mini-ethnography observation (Wolcott, 1990) applied to increase the researcher's awareness of a social phenomenon (Mason, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 1992), which focuses on particular setting such as their living area, economic status, and social activities. The case study approach that covers contextual conditions, not just the phenomenon of the study, is applied to facilitate a deep and holistic analysis (Yin, 1994). The research was conducted in a district which located next to Indonesian capital city. Respondents were determined by purposive sampling (Maxwell, 1996). The interviews and FGD were held with three respondent groups: the government representatives (GR), the internet company representatives (IC), and the local opinion leader (OL) including communities (LC). The secondary literatures were collected from the relevant agencies and academic database in community engagement and empowerment.

Internet access and facilities distribution program

Indonesia's internet distribution is a continuation from the previous communication access program, telephone access distribution. The program is the commitment of Indonesian government into Universal Service Obligation (USO) of Information and Communication Technology. The spirit of empowerment is performed in the government commitment in digital divide by minimizing information gap in Indonesia (Berita kominfo, 2013a; Berita kominfo, 2013b).

The telecommunication infrastructure mapping in Indonesia has been challenged by the disparity between the west and east areas of Indonesia (picture 1). The backbone infrastructure is available in the west area, that has concerned the government who recently focuses on improving USO to be Broadband Service Obligation (BSO) in all Indonesia areas. To achieve Indonesia connected, the program has been implemented into 3 tactics: Desa Pinter (Indonesian abbreviation for 'Rural with internet'), PLIK (Centre of Internet Service in District), and MPLIK (Mobile Center of Internet Service in District).



Picture 1. The map of Indonesia's backbone infrastructure

The internet distribution tactics are strategic tools to minimise digital divide and enhance Indonesian people's social and economic achievement. Thus, the program is ideally benefited community inclusively, to gain not only information, but also better opportunities to enhance their life quality. Regarding this complexity, Indonesian government applied partnerships with telecommunication providers. However, community has not been involved effectively, because of the missing socialization and engagement efforts.

Government program: (dis)engage the community

Government does vital in improving community life quality through the availability of facilities and services in many sectors, such as social, economic, education, and

health. However, information and benefit distribution have challenged most government program (Park & Wang, 2010; Kvasny, 2006). Cavaye (2000) explains that the social and economic changes lead to dynamic situations which requires the community to adjust actively, including the rural community. Thus, Cavaye (2000) underlines the pertinent of community capacity building, including the ability to anticipate change by thinking strategically and make informed decision. Relevant to community adjustment ability, intelligent-capability development is necessary while providing infrastructure. Green & Hayes (2012) note that community empowerment concerns not only to build physical, but also social and cultural capital. Thus, rural community should be knowledgeable to achieve community empowerment as a pivotal agenda in government program.

In the past two decades, there is a changing paradigm in government program, from a managerial approach to community engagement (Goddard, 2005; Head, 2007). Managerial approach highlights hierarchical and top-down planning, implementation, and communication; while community engagement facilitates community participation in planning, implementation, and communication. Brown, Kerry and Keast, Robyn (2003) identify community engagement as a new way of working together between government and citizen which requires specialised mixing, matching and managing of networked arrangement.

Many scholars define Community Engagement (CE) as community participation (Nelson & Petiit, 2004) which demands the building of institutional bridge between government and citizen (Head, 2007). Rogers (1995) highlights the term of participation as public consultation in a dialogue that lead to real participation in defining community's problems and solutions. This form of involving includes a competence-transfer which contributes to the program sustainability (Nelson & Petiit, 2004; Rogers, 1995). Given this, CE requires community relations efforts to boost their participation through the input, throughput, and output process to achieve an outcome.

Community engagement as a power sharing

Specifically, the essential of CE lies in the urgency of social problems, which have challenged government to achieve citizen empowerment. There are quests in government capability, which typically adopts top-down approach to resolve social problems (Goddard, 2005; Head, 2007). Thus, CE has encouraged the role of community as a subject, not only as an object, particularly in government program. In a democratic nation, community participation is a right that community deserves to be involved in the government program's planning and implementation. Head (2007) underlines the relevance between democracy notion and CE as a power sharing process, rather than an interest-groups management, which benefits government. Power sharing lies in acknowledgment of community existences, as Friedland (2001) argues that community does exist and right equal participation.

Thus, in a relation with CE definition, community deserves opportunities to be the part of an integrative government-community program. Community is not only legitimate the government agenda, but allowed to form a public agenda (Kilpatrick, 2009) from their problem identifications, including the solutions. This may build their responsibility as a part of the program. Kilpatrick (2009) finds in his research of rural community empowerment that understanding community facilitates CE through working together to achieve outcomes. Thus, a community-based program has been an agenda in creating a government program. This is not to say that community controls the government, rather to portray that government program should provide a space for community to work together with the government. Therefore, CE requires community-based program to formulate a proper CE through communication strategy in government program implementation.

Community-Based-Program (CBP)

Before discussing CBP, it is necessary to understand the term of community which may or may not be place-based (Green and Hayes, 2012). Community can be defined geographically who share norms and values, but also can be a group share or act on a common interest, such as religious or political issues. Additionally, Friedland (2001) consider community as a democracy participants who right to be involved in governance program. Relevant to the purpose, this paper focus on the community in a geographic area which share social norms and values, who also deserve to be democracy participants.

CBP has been an agenda in government program which requires community acknowledgement. To build an empower community, understanding community is essential to emerge a real community participation. The expansion of CBP has been an important trend in public campaign particularly health and social issues (Park & Wang, 2010). CBP seeks sustainable behavior (McKenzie, 2011) that most government program aims to. CBP focuses on the social and psychological aspects that effectively support behavioral change. McKenzie (2011) notes that CBP is an advanced approach from Information-based program which aims to create awareness. However, awareness remains in cognitive level when it fails to be penetrated in affective and conative level. Thus, social and psychological aspects are necessary in conducting an empowerment program which requires community participation.

Furthermore, the relevance between CBP and community participation is explained by Park & Wang (2010) who find that CBP works in public participation in poor alleviation in China that designated investment in poor villages based on participatory village planning. Additionally, Park & Wang (2010) state that in a community empowerment program, government roles matter in the distribution of program benefits. Clearly, this shows the pertinent of providing program benefits by facilitating community participation. Furthermore, Green and Haines (2012) emphasizes public participation and community control as pivotal factors in community empowerment program which focuses on poor and minority group. Thus

the program requires to apply CBP to facilitate social opportunity which facilitate them to improve their quality of life.

Community Engagement, Community-Based Program, and Public Participatory Communication

Engaging community into government program has been discussed by Brown, Kerry and Keast, Robyn (2003) that distinguish '3c' in a government program implementation: cooperation, coordination and collaboration. They identify a different establishment level in engaging community, from cooperation, coordination, and collaboration. Cooperation is characterised by a short term and low level of intensity to achieve the goal. Coordination refers to more formally relationship that requires information sharing as well as joint planning, decision-making, and action between organisations (Mulford and Rogers 1982; Daka-Mulwanda 1995; Lawson 2002, in Brown, Kerry and Keast, Robyn, 2003). The second C, coordination, requires higher level of commitment. The relationship is not dependent on the good will of the different actors, but has some of the force of an objective, a mandate, leading to a more enduring system of relationships between different components of a larger system. Thus, coordination is a kind of formal relationship with a typical top-down communication flow. Among the 3C, Collaboration is the most stable and long-term type of engagement. It demands a well-defined communication flow to involve the relevant actors by facilitating their participation rights.

Relevant with above discussion, the role of communication has been crucial in the program planning and implementation as a tool to boost community participation. Lawson (2002) explains that collaboration demands communication to achieve an integration into goal achievement. A communication method in dealing with public issue is largely defined as public communication which consists of public education and consultation (Nisbet, 2009). These two aspects refers to the term of participation as these demand a knowledge transfer. Agree with this, some scholars note that education and consultation are required in bridging communication between government and its public to create community engagement (Rogers, 1995; Rice & Atkin, 2001). Thus, a public participatory communication is an essential ingredient in building CE.

Additionally, Rice & Atkin (2001) identify the characteristic of public communication which are aims to change behavior by using non-commercial communication approach to provide public education and facilitate public consultation. Therefore, Atkin (2001); McGuire (2001) underline the pertinent of situational analysis to frame the social and cultural factors of the target public. In the context of this research, public participatory communication campaign needs to identify public characteristics, needs, and interest to achieve not only effective communication but also effective integrated program implementation.

Enacting community engagement in a government program of internet distribution

The data evidenced that the implementation of internet distribution program has benefited a part of the rural community, particularly students. Unfortunately, the local community, such as farmers, breeders, and home industries communities in the area have not gained socialisation and have not sustained any empowerment. A top-down and hierarchical communication approach had challenged the government in engaging and empowering rural Indonesian community. Less communication effort has minimized community participation which contests the community engagement and empowerment in the rural area.

An exclusive engagement and empowerment

According to the observation in the selected rural area, the internet facility is placed in one of the moeslem boarding school majoring information and technology. Thus, the facility is mostly accessed by internal students, yet students from other schools and local community. The Internet Company representative (IC) explained that they placed the computer in the school as it has the supporting devices and resources to guarantee the internet facilities sustainability. This is confirmed by the school people that the program comes in the right place, at the right time as the school has looked for infrastructure grants, particularly internet, as they have a limitation to provide that.

The facility works well and supports students improvement in academic, social, and economic aspects. The internet facility has been effectively empower students in developing their creativity and talent. Interestingly, students build a creative club which work voluntarily in developing the facility into some projects, such as integrating audio visual and internet technology; conducting computer skills training to junior students, and implementing online marketing. Students participation in internet use are high as they study information technology major. Thus, the internet facility effectively supports the students learning process. At present, students have established website, television and radio program, also photo gallery through the internet access. The school people explain:

“The facility supports students academic and softskill in computer major. Students develop a club to organise the internet use schedule and maintainance.”

“Creative team has been a students club which facilitate their academic, social, and economic development. Not only teachers, but also all students here (in the moeslem boarding house) are proud to be the part of creative team.”



Picture 2. Team creative in the moeslem boarding school as the actor in developing government's internet facility

Additionally, the internet access has motivate the internal school students and staff member to develop their entrepreneur skills. According to their explanation, most students are expected not to burden their parents' economy. Thus, they learn about online marketing by invite an online marketing expert and implement the skills.

“Students are creatively and volunterily develop the internet faacilities for their major study and softkills development. They are encouraged to learn about entrepreneurships by online marketing application. It supports not only their passion, but also their economic.”



Picture 3 & 4. The entrepreneurs' products in students online marketing activity

According to all statements above, it revealed that the internet facilities have established students' sense of belonging as one of the actors in developing the program sustainability. The program benefits students as a need and solution of their problem. This indicates that an empowerment required a fit and proper program with the problems, needs, and potencies of a community to boost its sustainability (Rice & Atkin, 2001; Atkinson et al, 2005; McGuire, 2001).

Additionally, IC representatives are regularly conduct coordination and internet maintainance to support the access establishment. Both the school people and the IC representatives explain that both sides are proactively updates the internet facilities progress, technically and socially. This indicates that community engagement were built through participatory communication (Kilpatrick, 2009; Visser, Lugt, & Stappers, 2007), that the students as the actor of the program were involved in the program implementation, particularly in developing and maintaining the facility. Servaes & Patchanee (2005) identify participatory communication which requires two-ways dialogical communication.

On the other hand, the local community representatives (LC) explained that they did not involved in the program implementation. Most of them stated that they do not even know about the program. During the program implementation in the moeslem boarding school, they thought that it is a grant for the school, not for the community.

“If it should be for community, we wish that we had the internet facility to be placed in our village office. But we do not even know.”

The statement indicates the absence of communication effort to local community representativesness from the very beginning. Additionally, they did not involved in the program implementation. Reflect to the program goals, the minimum communication efforts has failed to engage and empower the focal segment (Rogers, 1995; Rice & Atkin, 2001) of the local community, such as farmers, breeders, and home industries workers. As stated by one of the local government representatives that their people have less knowledge and opportunity to develop their potencies.

“Our people good in artistic karate performance, some local and national events invite us to perform, such as in Bali, Sumatera, event Singapore. We also have religious musical perfoemance (rebana), usually invited in wedding or local traditional event in kampoeng. They know us from mouth to mouth, no promotions.”

“...we have household production, such as cooking and cleaning utensils. We sell the product to reseller, then reseller sell it to the potential market.”

In fact, the people are encouraged to develop their potencies; however, the missing communication effort resulted in a higher gap between the government and the community (Park & Wang, 2010; Kvasny, 2006). The local community never been involved in a kind of public hearing or socialisation program. Clearly, the program was implemented based on the government interest, not community (Goddard, 2005).

Challenging community engagement

Community engagement has been a conceptual struggle for the government who implement a top-down approach in the internet distribution program. According to the local government representatives and community opinion leader, they did not received any socialisation of the internet distribution program. Although this is a central-coordination-program, they are expected to be socialised. Another hint in the exclusive engagement was explained as follow:

“Although this is a program from the central government, at least just let us know. We are their people here, we can assist that to penetrate the program effectively to the community.”

The statement emphasises that government failed to acknowledge the community representatives, also community as the actor, not the object of the community empowerment program. The government led the program to benefit some relevant partners such as the internet providers and placed the community secondarily. This implies that government conducts a program's actor acknowledgement based on a real economic and authority capital, but not social capital (Cavaye, 2000). Thus, community acknowledgement was missed and brought about a complete disconnection between the government and community.

Additionally, government ideally distributes not only the infrastructure but also benefits to the community. The program should involve a knowledge transfer (Nisbet, 2009) and power sharing (Head, 2007) that encourage community to create empowered actions (Cornish & Dunn, 2010). Relevant with the discussion of the program's actor acknowledgement, economic capital has pull the government to concern only on infrastructure. The internet distribution program has been less empowering because of the minimum community empowerment efforts (Park & Wang, 2010). Public participation and community control as pivotal factors in community empowerment program (Green & Hayes, 2012) are ignored that the empowerment appears exclusively.

Bridging the communities for better engagement and empowerment

Respondents' explanations imply a lacking comprehensive of community engagement and empowerment in the internet distribution program implementation. As engaging and empowering community requires community participation (Kilpatrick, 2009; Servaes & Patchanee, 2005), government is necessary to consider some pertinent aspects, such as community acknowledgement, a community-based program, and participatory communication.

Community acknowledgement refers to an effort to recognise the role of community as the actor, not object of the program. It demands social mapping to understand the local people, particularly the social roles and potential interests to support the program (Rice & Atkin, 2001; Green and Hayes, 2012; McGuire, 2001). Participation

requires not only profit orientation cooperation, but a genuine coordination and collaboration (Brown, Kerry and Keast, Robyn, 2003) into the relevant actors, including community representatives and members. Regarding the case study, a community membership mapping is required to scheme the position and roles in enabling community participation. Community is an entity; however, they may interest in different points (Brown, Kerry and Keast, Robyn, 2003). The case study presents that the school people notice in completing and improving their school facility for students, yet community. On the other hand, the local people concern on their potentials development with their minimum improvement capability. In fact, these mapping portray interesting opportunity to boost a comprehensive engagement and empowerment. An ignorance of this mapping may bring about a conflict in the community internally, which unable the engagement.

Next, the mapping of community will contribute to community participation establishment through communication activity. Enacting engagement requires proper communication methods and efforts in order to bridge many interests among relevant sides. Communication in an empowerment program highlights not only on distributing information, but also creating sustainability (Mckenzie, 2011), which refers to CBP.

According to the data, the case study has failed to implement a CBP program. The exclusive engagement and empowerment appear as a result of the exclusive communication. Thus, the government needs to apply participatory communication through relevant dialogical communication channel Servaes & Patchanee (2005), such as public hearing, public consultation, and public education (Rice & Atkin, 2001; Nisbet, 2009). The three channels aim to establish public empowerment as Cornish and Dunn (2010) note that participatory communication is on communicating rather than extracting or delivering information. Thus, the so called 'socialisation' should embrace a responsibility of empowerment aiming at community's quality of life, not just information diffusion.

Conclusion

The study adopted community engagement through participatory communication to examine the implementation of government's internet distribution program in one of rural area in Indonesia. The study takes the view that community acknowledgement, community-based-program, and public participatory communication are interrelated in empowering community engagement. The study revealed that economic and authority-based community engagement has resulted an exclusive engagement and empowerment. Notably, a genuine government-community empowerment program were clearly a challenge for the government who applied a top-down and exclusive communication approach and failed to acknowledge community as the actor, not the object of program implementation.

Community engagement is not an instant achievement; it requires a comprehensive stages of accomplishment through community mapping and participatory

communication. Apparently, government needs to be able to develop not only communication and managerial strategy, but also policy in integrating government-community of the empowerment program. The findings provide insights for government seeking to implement authentic sustainable community empowerment program in a developing country context. For stakeholders, this research provides criteria in developing community engagement in a rural community seeking to implement community empowerment.

This research focuses on one district area of the program implementation, which limits the generalisation to the program implementation in other districts of Indonesia. The study could be improved by larger sample size which may vary the results and insights for the community empowerment actors. Nonetheless, this research contributes to the growing literature dealing with community empowerment and engagement in the context of government program implementation.

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