

# Reinventing Focused-Strategy for Coastal Community Empowerment

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## Abstract

This paper provides a focused and implementable strategy for Community empowerment to alleviate poverty. This research was carried out in a coastal community on a remote island in an archipelagic country (Indonesia). This qualitative research used force field analysis to produce an appropriate strategy for alleviating community poverty. We indicated that there had been an improvement in the condition of the people - from below the poverty line to being on the poverty line. The desired condition was empowered communities that could get out of the poverty trap. By analyzing the force movements, we found that the movement of the driving forces was a little stronger than that of the restraining forces. This finding meant that the community could develop in a positive direction in the future. We recommend a focused and implementable strategy for strengthening the education of people in the community. This approach supports factors that drive the empowerment of the community while simultaneously reducing the restraining factors.

**Keywords:** Coastal poverty, Community empowerment, Focused strategy, Force field analysis

## Introduction

Effective poverty alleviation requires an appropriate and implementable strategy, rather than a comprehensive strategy that is difficult to implement. The poverty trap is a multidimensional problem, which is difficult to solve unidimensionally. Comprehensive strategies are needed to overcome this problem, but this approach also has many requirements. These requirements are no less complicated than the problem itself, so that a comprehensive approach does not produce satisfactory results. Therefore, a different approach is needed - a small, focused, and implementable approach that brings a positive direction towards community empowerment in the future.

The research on community empowerment developed from the deprivation trap (Chambers, 1983), which explained how difficult it was for the poor to get out of poverty. To overcome this, Friedmann (1992) rejected a solely economic approach and proposed a political approach. This political approach was supported by Adamson and Bromiley (2013); Ahmad

and Abu Talib (2015); Zakrzewska (2017); Hijjang, et al. (2018), Waridin et al. (2018); Jowah (2019); Tauzer, et al. (2019); Varghese (2019); Nayak and Panigrahi (2020) who showed that community participation was needed in community empowerment and poverty alleviation.

Despite the support from these numerous studies, the political approach is also considered inadequate. The deprivation trap is multidimensional and must be resolved through a holistic approach, as proposed by Ife (1995; 2009) and Narayan (2005). Improvements in all dimensions are needed, and many parties need to be involved in community empowerment so that poverty can be alleviated. This integrated approach is also supported by many recent research studies (Adamson & Bromiley, 2013; Wisesa et al, 2017; Msutwana & Nyawo, 2019; Wang & Crosby, 2019; Singh & Chudasama, 2020).

This holistic approach has now been challenged incisively by Banerjee and Duflo (2017), who found that too many requirements were needed to implement this approach, leading to ineffective empowerment of the community. Poverty continues to make communities helpless, but Banerjee and Duflo (2017) proposed thinking small, by again using a more limited but more focused approach, so that the direction of future improvement becomes clearer. This limited approach was supported by the research of Duflo (2004), Banerjee et al. (2017), who successfully demonstrated that each case of poverty was unique, so there were differences in context between one community and another.

All of these previous studies led to the same target, which is the empowered community. This was demonstrated by several studies (Ahmad & Abu Talib, 2015; Waridin et al, 2018; Deepa & Murthy, 2019; Ab-Rahim & Shah, 2019), which described how community empowerment was ideally created from a successful empowerment process. Nayak and Panigrahi (2020) showed that empowered people eventually empower themselves economically, socially, and politically.

Community empowerment is a desirable condition for deprived coastal communities in Indonesia. Coastal communities are very important for archipelagic state such as Indonesia which has more than 17,000 islands (Badan Informasi Geospasial Pusat Hidrografi dan Oseanografi TNI AL, 2019). There are 12,857 coastal villages throughout the country (Statistical Yearbook of Indonesia, 2020). Currently, many coastal communities are in poverty traps, which are difficult to get out of, even though economic development and empowerment programs have been carried out over many years. Villages in coastal areas in Indonesia are synonymous with poverty (Natalia & Alie, 2014). One example is Dekatagung Village, Sangkapura District, Gresik Regency, East Java Province. The conditions of poverty found in this village occur in many coastal villages in Indonesia, which is the largest archipelago in the world and is the country with the second-longest coastline in the world. Most of the population living in Dekatagung Village are currently classified as being on the poverty line. This condition arises because of the limited community capacity in terms of finance, skills, and knowledge. The people in this coastal area live in inadequate conditions. This can be seen from the condition of the houses, the number of children dropping out of school, economic limitations, and the low quality of resources. Such conditions have been present for a long time, but unfortunately, many empowerment programs in the village did not have any significant positive results.

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The purpose of this research is to produce a strategy for empowering coastal communities that are in generational poverty - the strategy needed to be focused and implementable. A focused strategy has a leverage that changes things for the better, while an implementable strategy is one that is not difficult to carry out because it is supported by the potential of the existing situation. Often, community empowerment is trapped by a comprehensive and ideal strategy, which is difficult to implement because it has too many requirements. The more requirements, the more difficult they are to carry out, and the more difficult it is to carry out, the longer the community will be in a state of deprivation and powerlessness.

### **Literature review**

Friedmann (1992) stated that poverty is difficult to alleviate because development is centered on growth. Communities remain poor because they do not have the ability to voice their interests and use knowledge to escape poverty. Poverty alleviation programs are top-down government programs, so there are differences between what is needed by the community and what they are given. A political approach is required, so that community needs are included in the development policy agenda. Friedmann's view was supported by Adamson (2010), Adamson and Bromiley (2013).

Ife (1995; 2009) developed an alternative to the political approach for tackling the problem. His study developed the theory of integrated community development by offering a more holistic approach, which included multidimensional development. This approach was developed from the belief that unidimensional approaches can never be solved problems. Initially, integrated community development (Ife, 1995) included six dimensions: social, economic, political, cultural, environmental, and personal/spiritual development. Later, it became seven dimensions by adding survival-based development (Ife, 2009). All dimensions have the same importance, so they should be used integratively, not partially, to solve the problem of community empowerment. Research conducted by Singh and Chudasama (2020), Msutwana and Nyawo (2019) supported this approach.

This holistic approach was also supported by Narayan (2005), who developed the conceptual framework of empowerment. This framework is a process that leads to development outcomes in the form of empowered communities, both individually and collectively, and it is supported by good governance. Empowerment involves creating an opportunity structure and the agency of the poor. The first aims to solve the problem of voicelessness and the second aims to resolve the problem of powerlessness. The opportunity structure is improved by establishing an institutional climate (which supports the provision of local organizations' information, participation, accountability, and capacity) and a socio-political structure (which is characterized by openness, competitiveness, and managed conflict). The agency of the poor increases the number of assets and capabilities, both from the individual side (which includes material, human, social, and psychological aspects), as well as from the collective side of the local community (which includes aspirations, organization, representation, and shared identity).

Banerjee and Duflo (2017) rejected the use of the holistic approach because, in reality, this approach is difficult to implement. This approach is seen as too complicated, so it fails to alleviate poverty. This complicated formula is considered interesting when discussed in the academic realm but is not practical in the field. They also rejected a political approach that ignores economic aspects. They showed that small actions in the area of economics can improve the welfare of the community in the medium term. Small changes can bring significant changes to poverty alleviation; if the direction of change is right, then success will be achieved if adequate time is allowed. Duflo (2004) showed that interventions through the development of the education sector in Indonesia helped to improve the welfare of the community, but these impacts are only experienced in the future, in the medium term. Poverty has a different context of space and time, thus, it is unique. There is no effective universal recipe for solving the problem of poverty. There is a problem of scale if adopting success in a particular local area for regional or national policy (Banerjee et al., 2017). For this reason, alleviating poverty requires a deep understanding of the local spatial and temporal context. There are differences in validity between smaller scales and broader scales. The differences are influenced by six challenges: market balance, externalities, political reaction, context, location selection bias, and piloting bias.

### **Methodology**

This qualitative research was carried out by collecting data in 2019. Interviews with informants were selected purposively, including the Village Head and several community members, the District Secretary, and the Head of Section in Sangkapura district. The data were analyzed using the Force Field Analysis (FFA) developed by Kurt Lewin (Swinton, 2019; Swanson & Creed, 2014; Burnes & Cooke, 2012; Schwering, 2003). Three stages were applied. First, the identification of various factors which were classified into two types. A factor was classified as a driving/positive force for change if it encouraged community empowerment. A factor was classified as a restraining/negative force for change if it impeded community empowerment. Second, each factor was assessed and scored. Each factor was assessed by considering the level of impetus and obstacles and scored as 1 for low, 2 for medium, and 3 for high. After totalling the scores, the factors were compared to find out the strongest driving and restraining forces. Third, the arrangement of options, which were useful for finding alternatives that allowed the impetus to increase and the obstacles to decrease. This stage determined the strategy or action needed to change the present state to the desired state.

### **Results and discussion**

This study examined the previous state of the community and the interaction between the driving and restraining factors that led to the community's present state. Proper analysis of these interactions indicates how the desired state of the community might be achieved. The previous state was identified as the community's poverty, with the present state as reduced

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poverty, and the desired state as an empowered community. The driving forces identified were the provision of roads, renovation of poor people's houses, provision of access to education, assistance for improving livelihood, and people's hard-working and cooperative characters.

Road access is an important factor in supporting community mobility. The road network connects activity centers and settlements with trade centers. The Village Government is increasing the availability of inter-hamlet road access in Dekatagung Village. From 2013 to 2018, the Village Government developed 28 village roads. Currently, road access is evenly distributed and can be used by people who live in all parts of Dekatagung Village. The community now enjoys accessing the roads to the village, which were previously difficult to use. Difficult access to transportation brings other difficulties. When the village government was able to develop the roads, this is regarded as a form of village government involvement for the community.

Renovation of poor people's houses was one of the programs run by the village government to help people in need. The need for housing is a basic human need that must be met to escape from the problems of poverty. The government began a house renovation program, which ran from 2013 to 2018, and 11 houses were renovated. Funding for house renovation programs was not only funded by the Village Budget, but there was also some support from the Amil Zakat Agency. This development was carried out in stages, and the results were enjoyed by the people in need.

Access to education was enhanced by increasing the availability of educational facilities. Educational institutions available in the village included kindergartens, elementary schools, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (Islamic elementary schools), and junior high schools (SMP). Educational facilities provided by the village government were quite comprehensive and involved community participation in building the facilities. There was no charge for the people participating in education, and educational improvements were organized to change people's mindset from viewing the children as a factor of production in the short term to viewing them as an investment for a better family life in the long term.

The village government provided the assistance needed by fishermen by delivering information on how to assess the weather conditions, catch the fish, and detect the location of fish in the sea. This assistance benefited the whole community by increasing employment opportunities. Other forms of assistance provided included counseling for communities and consolidation meetings with relevant groups. Counseling was accomplished by forming farmers' and fishermen's groups. Each group was led by a chairperson to promote the efficient sharing of understanding of what activities were needed and how they were to be implemented.

Another positive factor was cooperation as important social capital in community empowerment. The community upheld a sense of kinship, which was manifested in cooperation in achieving common goals, a high sense of empathy in helping to alleviate the difficulties of other community members, and harmonious neighbourly relationships. This social life played a role as the basis for the mutual cooperative activities that were often carried out by the community. This social feeling was also combined with a sense of kinship, which generally appeared spontaneously, in helping others who were experiencing difficulties. This social feeling was ingrained so that it became a basic assumption in the community. The community

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also had a hard-working character - they worked hard every day from morning to late at night. Even though the results obtained tended to be mediocre, the community was not discouraged by the results. The people were always hard-working and diligent, whatever the results. The community always cooperated in making a life for people, and in bearing the difficulties faced by other community members.

Next, we turn to the restraining forces. These are the negative factors that oppose the driving forces in trying to reach the present state and the desired state. The restraining forces identified included: low-quality human resources, strong traditional communities, seasonal livelihoods, and low levels of community economics.

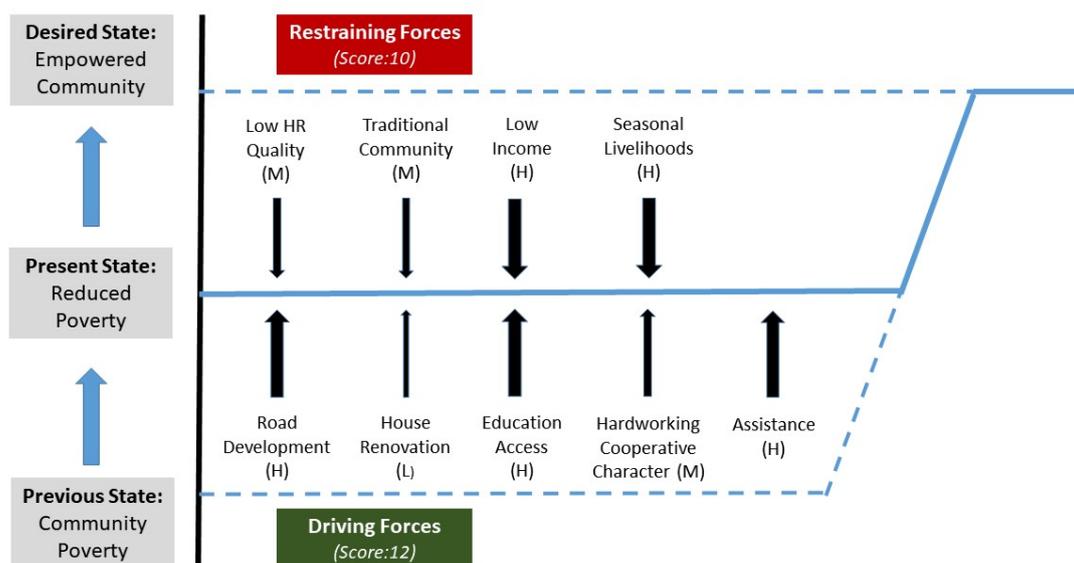
Human resources in the community were relatively low, as indicated by educational attainment only being at the primary school level. There was low motivation to educate school-age children at higher levels. There were obstacles from the community, as they gave little support for educating their children because of their assumption was that participation in education was a cost to the household budget. Involving children in fishing activities meant that children were a productive factor that increased family income. This mindset restrained community empowerment efforts severely.

Most fishermen used traditional fisheries technology. Fish processing was still simple, with only a limited range of basic products such as dried fish, salted fish, and petis (fish-based sauce). Fish processing did not use modern technology. Assistance provided by the village government was still limited to informing new work-related information and motivating them to work hard. There was no modern or advanced technological assistance for improving fishing outcomes. The replacement of traditional tools with modern ones would present new problems. The community was not ready for the consequences of adopting new technology.

Most people worked in fishing, with a small number of community members working as farmers. Family income depended on the work. Fishing was a seasonal job that could not provide income every day of the year. The income earned every day was also uncertain as it depended on the weather conditions. Fishermen would sail if the weather was not bad. It was hard to sail in heavy rain and winds. Farming was only possible in the rainy season, and there were only rain-fed rice fields in the village. Community livelihoods were seasonal because they were completely influenced by nature. Fishing was only possible during the dry season. Thus, household income was irregular from day to day throughout the year. Of course, the necessities of life needed to be fulfilled every day regardless of the season. As a result, the community was still classified as lower class.

After determining that the present state of the village was better than the previous state, and describing the all existing factors, the next stage was an assessment of the driving forces. A high score (H) was given for providing roads and accessing to education, and livelihood assistance, a medium score (M) was given for being hard-working and cooperative, and a low score (L) was given for house renovation. The four factors that constituted the restraining forces were also assessed based on the level of the obstacles that needed to be overcome to reach the present state and desired state. A medium score (M) was given for the low quality of human resources, and the presence of traditional communities, a high (H) score was given for the low level of the community economy, and for having seasonal livelihoods.

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**Figure 1** Direction of change

The total score for the driving forces was 12, and the total score for the restraining forces was 10, see Figure 1. Thus, it was concluded that the driving forces were stronger than the restraining forces, and this difference accounted for the direction of change from the previous state to the present state of improved progress. The direction of change needed to continue from the present state towards the desired state, but the small difference between the two types of forces also showed that the direction of progress was slow. If this situation continued, the direction of progress towards the desired state would also be slow. A proper strategy was needed to accelerate progress.

The next stage was to formulate the strategy that was most likely to achieve the desired state – an empowered community. Based on the mapping of the existing factors, three strategies were devised. The first strategy was to increase the levels of the driving forces, so they were even more powerful in driving change in the desired direction. The second strategy was to reduce the levels of the restraining factors so that the obstacles hindering change towards the desired state were smaller. The third strategy was to combine the first two strategies. Of course, this third strategy was the best approach to achieving the goals. If all of the steps in these three strategies were taken, then this would be similar to a holistic approach to community empowerment (Ife, 1995, 2009; Narayan, 2005). However, the implementation of the strategy still needed to take into account the availability of the resources required (Adamson, 2010). Without adequate resources, this approach could not be implemented or would fail. In a situation like this, it helps to “think big and think small,” as suggested by Banerjee and Duflo (2017). We analyzed all the driving and restraining factors (thinking big) in community empowerment that affected the alleviation of poverty. We then tried to take small steps that

were focused and implementable (thinking small), because they were supported by the available resources.

The main step that could be taken was to increase community access to education. This step involved encouraging a stronger driving factor in access to education, and at the same time, reducing the medium restraining force of low-quality human resources. This step could be carried out not only by building physical facilities and educational institutions but also by improving the quality of these educational institutions. This results in a step-change in the average educational attainment of the community, from primary school to secondary school. This step could also be strengthened by utilizing recent government programs (both central and provincial governments), which prioritize free access to basic education (primary and secondary school). There was a lot of educational funding assistance provided by the government and the Amil Zakat Agency, which could be accessed by the community. Thus, the problem of students dropping out of school could be resolved. The problem of parents hesitating to let their children have a better education could also be resolved. This consideration was important because there were two reasons why parents were reluctant to let their children go to school. First, the cost of schooling was a family burden. This could be overcome by reducing or waiving school fees. Second, children were a factor in production who helped the family income. This situation could be overcome through counseling to make people aware of the importance of education, both for the future of their children and for the family.

Education is a long-term investment for families in alleviating poverty. Education has a significant impact on solving human poverty problems while it has a negative effect on Human Development Index (Al Nasser & Al Hallaq, 2019). If many families are better educated, it has a positive impact on the community as a whole through a domino type effect. Encouraging better access to education can also reduce barriers to the development of empowered communities. Better access to education also reduces the problem of low quality of human resources, which restrain the progress of the community towards ending poverty and lead to the community's inability to increase work productivity and to absorb new knowledge and technology. Having low-quality human resources means that people lack the motivation for personal growth and learning. Education opens people's minds to accept novelty and improvements. Better access to education reduces barriers to the development of human resources and has long-term effects on the alleviation of poverty in coastal village communities. This idea resembles the idea that community development should design community capability first in order to have sustainable self-empowerment (Wisesa et al, 2017).

The choice of small and focused steps was a key feature of the third strategy we considered - to strengthen the driving factors and reduce the restraining factors. These small, focused steps could be implemented because of the availability of resources. Support for effective implementation can be managed simply. This approach cannot solve all of the problems immediately as it needs time to achieve the results. Our strategy was similar to the one described by Duflo (2004) and reinforced the theory of Banerjee and Duflo (2017) and the research of Banerjee et al. (2017).

The novelty of this study was in providing support for a new theory of community empowerment, which synthesizes the existing strands of the theoretical debate on community

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empowerment. Initially, community empowerment theory focused on the economic aspects of empowerment. However, this approach was criticized by Friedmann (1992), who proposed that the focus should be on political aspects of empowerment. Both of these views can be categorized as unidimensional approaches to empowering people. This unidimensional approach was later criticized by Ife (1995; 2009) and Narayan (2005), who proposed that poverty is multidimensional, so the solution should also be multidimensional. A holistic approach was proposed for community empowerment to alleviate poverty, but this approach was too complicated, making it difficult to implement. Banerjee and Duflo (2017) proposed a synthesis in which community empowerment should involve analyzing problems holistically but solving the problems in a focused manner. By focusing on limited factors, we can obtain the available supporting resources to solve the problems. The source of the problem for alleviating poverty is that we need too many resources that are difficult to obtain. By focusing on small and implementable actions, improvements to empower the community take place. Of course, it takes time (the medium-term) to have significant results. The crucial point is about how to decide the small, focused, and implementable actions. The actions is a leverage for solving the big and complicated problem. Think big and think small is a new way to solve this problem. By comprehensively analyzing the many forces bearing on the situation, leverage can result in small changes bringing big changes for all.

### **Conclusion**

This research concluded that education acted as a factor that could help to alleviate the severe and acute problems that occurred in coastal communities in the research area. By comparing the strengths of the restraining and the driving forces in the force-field analysis, it was found that the driving forces were still stronger than the restraining forces, so changes in the local community were still proceeding towards the desired state. By comparing several factors comprising the driving forces, it was concluded that education had leverage in empowering people to alleviate poverty. However, education was not a factor that could directly and quickly solve the problem of poverty. Education is a medium-term investment for families and communities to improve the quality of life sustainably.

The theoretical novelty of this research lies in its support of the synthesis approach, used by Banerjee and Duflo (2017), in a deprived rural coastal community. This synthesis approach comprehensively analyzed community empowerment problems and then focused on certain aspects that were implementable in solving problems effectively. This synthesis approach was an adaptation of the single approach used by Friedmann (1992) and the holistic approach used by Ife (1995; 2009); Narayan (2005).

This research had limitations in its scope. More research is needed on a wider regional scale - at the provincial or state level. In addition, this research was carried out in a rural coastal community on a small island. Thus, further research is needed in the context of poor agrarian communities in remote areas and poor urban communities, who are often acutely deprived and face difficulty in getting out of the poverty trap. Methodologically, a study with a systems thinking approach is needed to understand the dynamic complexity of the community empowerment system in alleviating poverty and for testing whether education is the leverage

in the system. Together these studies would provide knowledge to support strong public policymaking in strengthening the system.

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