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**FROM PASSIVE BENEFICIARIES TO ACTIVE AGENTS:
EXPLORING THE ROLE OF RURAL COMMUNITIES IN
HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IN EASTERN
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Indonesia*Correspondence E-mail: ahmadrosandi8@gmail.comDOI: <https://doi.org/10.30598/baileofisipvol1iss2pp155-165>**ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the dynamics of community participation in human resource development within Barakkae Village, Lamuru District, Bone Regency, Eastern Indonesia. The primary objective is to explore the extent to which rural communities shift from being passive recipients of development initiatives to becoming active agents in shaping human capital outcomes. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation involving eight community members over the course of one month. The findings reveal a significant gap between theoretical models of participatory development and actual practice. Community involvement remains limited, particularly in decision-making processes, which are largely monopolized by village elites. This exclusion results in a lack of awareness, limited grassroots engagement, and diminished program ownership among the broader population. Additionally, the effectiveness and sustainability of human resource development programs are hindered by inadequate socialization strategies and insufficient funding. Evaluation mechanisms currently employed by village authorities also lack systematic integration of community feedback, further weakening the impact and relevance of ongoing initiatives. The novelty of this research lies in its contextual analysis of participatory barriers in a rural Indonesian setting, contributing to a deeper understanding of how local power structures and institutional limitations influence community agency. The study recommends the adoption of inclusive planning forums, the institutionalization of proposal repositories for bottom-up input, and stronger budget advocacy as pathways to reinforce local participation. These insights provide a valuable contribution to the broader discourse in social sciences and humanities by emphasizing the transformative potential of community-driven human development in peripheral regions.

Keywords: Community Participation, Development, Human Resources, village governance, rural development

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, human resource development (HRD) has become a central axis in national development agendas, especially in regions long considered peripheral, such as Eastern Indonesia (Agastia, 2021; Gaus, 2019). However, amidst the euphoria of ongoing development programs, one fundamental question is often overlooked: to what extent are village

communities—who are themselves the subjects of development—truly involved in the process of shaping their human potential? In many villages, including Barakkae Village in Lamuru Subdistrict, Bone Regency, communities are still often positioned as passive recipients of top-down policies. Yet experience has shown that active community participation is a key factor in ensuring the effectiveness, sustainability, and meaningfulness of any human resource development initiative.

Various studies have demonstrated that participatory approaches in development not only strengthen program resilience but also reinforce social cohesion and community ownership over the changes taking place (Chavez-Miguel et al., 2022; McDonnell et al., 2019; Musavengane, 2019). The concept of community-driven development has been widely discussed and implemented in various parts of the world, including rural contexts in Africa and South Asia (Machin-Mastromatteo, 2023; Rwigema, 2022). However, implementation at the local level often encounters structural and cultural realities that do not always support equal spaces for participation.

In Indonesia, studies on community participation in village development have grown significantly. For instance, Syukri (2023) shows how local elites often control the village development agenda, while research by Reuter & MacRae (2022) and Rulinawaty et al. (2023) emphasizes the importance of grassroots feedback mechanisms to prevent community alienation from government programs. Studies by Saud (2020) and Sunarti & Zebua (2023) also highlight the limitations of program socialization, which result in low levels of community engagement. Research by Akbar et al. (2021), focusing on participatory planning in villages in Central Java, even found that community involvement is often merely symbolic rather than substantive.

Moreover, several participatory development models have been tested in various contexts. Models such as Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) and Participatory Rural Appraisal aim to position communities not only as actors but also as legitimate holders of local knowledge (Astawa et al., 2022; Sandham et al., 2019; Sulaeman et al., 2023). However, in practice—particularly in areas still characterized by hierarchical social structures—these models do not automatically function effectively (Häsler et al., 2019; Hildayanti et al., 2023; Omondi, 2023). A study by Diprose (2023) in coastal areas of Southeast Sulawesi, for instance, reveals that HRD programs often fail to reach the grassroots due to the lack of open communication forums and the limited advocacy capacity of residents.

This gap between theory and practice is also reflected in the evaluation of the Village Fund program by Bappenas, which shows that despite formal procedures for village deliberation, only a small portion of residents feel that their opinions are genuinely considered (Fitriani et al., 2020; Sofyani et al., 2019). This is where the importance of this study lies. When social structures and norms continue to limit broad participation, efforts to develop human resources based on community involvement will be fundamentally flawed. At the same time, this opens up an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of how local social realities—with all their complexities of power relations and institutional limitations—shape how communities interpret

and respond to development.

In this context, although many previous studies have mapped the importance of participation in village development—such as research by Damayanti & Syarifuddin (2020) and Nugrahani et al. (2019)—very few have truly explored how such participation manifests in human resource development practices in Eastern Indonesia, a region often marginalized in the national development narrative. Efforts to promote participation are frequently trapped in proceduralism, without adequately understanding the local dynamics that make communities reluctant or even unable to participate actively.

This study seeks to fill that gap—a space where participation is not merely understood as an administrative checklist, but as a complex, meaningful social dynamic shaped by local power relations. Barakkae Village was selected not only because it is representative of villages in Eastern Indonesia, but also because it features various human resource development initiatives that are critically worth studying. Through a qualitative and descriptive approach, this research explores the experiences, understandings, and strategies of local communities in responding to externally driven HRD initiatives.

In addition, this study does not merely offer a critique of exclusive development practices, but also presents a contextual reflection on how rural communities navigate constraints and seek spaces to voice their interests. Herein lies the strength of the approach: not only in its empirical findings but also in its boldness to reveal realities often obscured by formal reports and government program success narratives. From this perspective, the transformation of communities from passive recipients to active agents of development is not a linear process, but a journey full of negotiations that heavily depends on how participatory spaces are created and managed. This study aims to explore these dynamics, with the hope of enriching the scholarly discourse on community-based development and paving the way for more inclusive, context-sensitive approaches that truly position communities as genuine subjects of development.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at understanding the dynamics of community participation in human resource development (HRD) at the village level in a deep and contextual manner. This approach was chosen because the nature of the problem cannot be adequately explained through numbers or statistics alone. Community participation—especially in rural contexts—is a social phenomenon rich in meaning, interpretation, and subjective experience that can only be captured through direct engagement with the social realities in which it occurs (Lochmiller, 2021). Therefore, qualitative methods are the most relevant approach to explore how communities interpret their roles in development and the obstacles they encounter.

The selection of Barakkae Village, located in Lamuru Subdistrict, Bone Regency, South Sulawesi, was not without reason. This village represents the general characteristics of villages in

Eastern Indonesia, which have long been situated on the periphery of national policy-making centers. Moreover, Barakkae Village has been the site of several HRD programs supported by village funds and collaborations with non-governmental organizations, yet it has not been widely studied in academic literature. Its geographical remoteness, combined with strong and hierarchical social relations, makes the village a fertile ground for examining how community participation operates in practice. The research was conducted over the span of one month, allowing sufficient time for the researcher to build trust with the residents and directly observe the social dynamics at play.

In collecting data, the researcher engaged eight key informants, consisting of villagers from diverse backgrounds—including community leaders, village officials, youth, and ordinary residents who have been the targets of HRD programs. Informants were selected purposively, considering their direct experiences and knowledge of the implementation of development programs in the village. This purposive sampling aimed to ensure that the data obtained would not only be rich in information but also reflect the various perspectives within the community (Lochmiller, 2021).

Data collection methods included in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were chosen because they allowed the researcher to elicit the personal narratives of informants regarding their experiences with village development programs. Through open-ended questions and warm conversations, the researcher could capture not only factual information but also the emotions, interpretations, and aspirations embedded in their stories. Participant observation was conducted by joining in the community's daily activities, including village deliberations and training sessions related to HRD. The researcher's presence as an engaged observer enabled the collection of contextual data that interviews alone could not provide. Meanwhile, document analysis involved examining village documents such as meeting minutes, activity proposals, and budget reports to provide empirical grounding for the field findings and to strengthen data validity.

To ensure data credibility and validity, this study applied source and method triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from informants who held different social positions in the community to avoid the bias of a single narrative. For example, the viewpoint of a hamlet head was compared with that of ordinary residents concerning the implementation of job training programs, thus providing a more comprehensive picture. Method triangulation was carried out by cross-checking interview results with direct observation and documentary evidence. If interviews indicated that residents were not involved in program planning, this claim was verified by checking whether their names appeared in the meeting records. This process was carried out thoroughly and continuously throughout the research period, in line with validation principles in qualitative research (Lochmiller, 2021).

Throughout the research process, ethical considerations were upheld by establishing egalitarian relationships with informants. Each informant was informed about the purpose of the study, and their oral consent was obtained before interviews began. The information provided

by informants was kept confidential, and their identities were not disclosed explicitly to protect their privacy and ensure their comfort during and after the research. This study rests on the awareness that human beings are not mere objects of research, but dialogical partners who possess voices, agency, and valuable perspectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Gap Between Participatory Narratives and Field Practices

In the discourse of participatory development, community participation is often praised as a fundamental cornerstone of successful programs, including in human resource development (HRD). Normatively, participation is defined as the active involvement of citizens in every stage of development—from planning, implementation, to evaluation. However, when this ideal is applied in the context of Barakkae Village, a clear gap emerges between rhetoric and reality. In practice, community involvement tends to be symbolic rather than substantive. This aligns with Depari's (2023) findings that community participation in developing countries often halts at the procedural level, without granting citizens real power to influence decisions.

Field findings indicate that in every village deliberation forum, such as Musrenbang, only a handful of actors are actively engaged in decision-making processes. These include village officials, members of the Village Consultative Body (BPD), community leaders, and youth organizations such as Karang Taruna. Ordinary citizens merely sit as passive listeners, and their attendance is often purely a formality. One informant, S., stated that although he attended village meetings, he never felt genuinely heard, let alone given space to propose ideas. His statement reflects a common condition in the village, where deliberative space is only available to those with structural proximity to the village government.

One-month-long field observations reinforced this finding. In a village meeting discussing budget allocation for skills training, it was evident that the agenda and decisions had been predetermined by village officials. The meeting was brief, discussion was minimal, and when asked what types of training the village youth needed, the officials responded that it had already been "decided last year." Several villagers appeared confused and unaware of the program's purpose. This situation reveals the limited room for negotiation in program planning and reinforces the thesis that participation in Barakkae has yet to evolve into an empowering instrument.

As Nugrahani et al. (2019) explain, ideally, community participation in development should include problem identification, alternative planning, and impact evaluation. However, in Barakkae, this process is far from holistic. The sense of ownership over programs is low, as the community is excluded from the decision-making process from the outset. Even after programs are implemented, many residents remain unaware that these activities are part of the village's HRD agenda. This aligns with Manurung et al.'s (2023) argument that community contribution

can only emerge when people believe that the programs offer direct benefits to themselves and their communities.

A divergence in vision between the village government and the community also contributes to planning inconsistencies. While the community exhibits high enthusiasm and tangible contributions to physical development projects such as roads or health posts (posyandu), there is marked apathy regarding HRD. According to I., a female informant, the training she once attended did not align with real needs. She felt the activity was more about “spending the budget” than enhancing community capacity. This highlights a gap in understanding between the village as a planning institution and the community as program beneficiaries.

This analysis is further supported by Astawa et al. (2022) and Sulaeman et al. (2023), who emphasize that exclusion in development is not merely physical or administrative, but also cultural and symbolic. When communities are not given space to speak, or when their opinions are dismissed by stakeholders, systematic marginalization occurs. In Barakkae’s context, the dominance of village elites—both formal and informal—has created a power structure that sidelines ordinary citizens from decision-making spaces.

It is therefore unsurprising that HRD initiatives in the village often lack direction, sustainability, and participation. When programs are designed without listening to citizens’ voices, their implementation lacks a participatory spirit. Villagers become passive recipients with no emotional connection or sense of responsibility toward program outcomes. This indirectly affirms Fitriani et al.’s (2020) finding that a passive mindset among citizens reflects a development pattern that has yet to touch the roots of genuine participation.

Exclusion in Decision-Making Processes: An Embedded Social Reality

Although community participation is nominally facilitated in formal forums such as village deliberation meetings, it often remains superficial. Ordinary citizens may be physically present, but they do not actively express opinions or substantively engage in decision-making processes. Their involvement tends to be symbolic and procedural rather than participatory in the transformative sense. This is where institutional exclusion becomes apparent—a form of exclusion rooted not only in non-inclusive formal structures but also in constraining norms and local culture.

Musavengane (2019) explains that institutional exclusion in participatory development is multidimensional: it encompasses structural, cultural, and relational dimensions. In the context of Barakkae Village, this exclusion manifests through hierarchical social relations, where the voices of ordinary residents are often deemed less valid than those of traditional leaders, village elites, or government officials. Field observations showed that even when discussion spaces were formally opened in planning meetings, forum dynamics were dominated by village officials and a few community figures. The atmosphere felt rigid and top-down, causing lay villagers to remain silent.

One resident, Mrs. S—active in women’s and health programs—shared that she often felt awkward when trying to voice opinions during village meetings. According to her, “there are already certain people who usually speak,” and if she were to speak up, she feared being seen as disrespectful or out of place. This narrative reflects the strength of social hierarchies that limit the expression of ordinary citizens in public spaces. Such social pressure silences aspirations not due to a lack of willingness but because of the absence of safe spaces to speak.

Further observations reveal that deliberation forums often serve more to legitimize prearranged decisions than to function as open deliberative spaces. In one planning activity for youth training programs, although many young people were invited, most remained passive. When asked why they did not speak up, one youth, A, explained that their proposals were often ignored. “We once suggested IT training, but they said there was no budget. Then the next year, it wasn’t allocated again,” he said. This caused discouragement and reduced their motivation to voice aspirations again.

Structurally, the absence of written or systematic reporting mechanisms for community input further entrenches exclusion. Undocumented aspirations risk being omitted from decision-making processes. In planning documents, there was no record of proposals from marginalized groups such as housewives, youth, or small-scale farmers. This supports Fitriani et al.’s (2020) argument that tokenistic participation creates an illusion of inclusiveness without altering the unequal power structure.

Challenges and Opportunities Toward a Transformation of Community Roles

Transforming community roles from mere beneficiaries into active agents of development is a complex and challenging process. In Barakkae Village, this change remains in its early stages, yet signs of critical awareness—particularly among the youth—are beginning to emerge. They have started to voice their opinions and utilize informal spaces as venues for learning and idea-sharing. Although this transformation is not yet widespread, it offers hope for a future where citizens not only await assistance but actively co-design and oversee the development of their village.

Nevertheless, the challenges are significant. One of them is the limited space for self-actualization, especially for youth, in development planning and evaluation processes. Field observations show that most village agendas are still dominated by older groups who hold stronger social and structural positions. In one village meeting attended by the researcher, the forum atmosphere was monotonous, with one-way communication patterns. The youth were present but mostly passive, some preoccupied with their phones, not truly engaging in the meeting. This reflects a gap between formal participatory structures and actual community engagement in village forums.

Still, seeds of change are sprouting. One informant, R, a village youth, shared that he and several friends initiated a digital study group to discuss development issues and local economic opportunities. They use social media and open spaces at the village hall (outside official hours)

for informal discussions. According to R, “if we only join the village meetings, we often feel like we have no room to speak. But if we create our own activities, we can set the topics ourselves.” This statement shows that even though formal structures do not fully support active participation, young citizens can create counter-spaces as expressions of their political agency (Sandham et al., 2019).

Such initiatives illustrate that social transformation can emerge from the grassroots and requires support in the form of a conducive ecosystem. Strategic mechanisms to encourage this transformation include inclusive planning forums, citizen advocacy training, and transparency of village budgets. If deliberative forums are organized with a participatory, inclusive, and less bureaucratic approach, more residents—especially youth and women—will feel meaningfully engaged. Strengthening citizen capacity through advocacy training is also strategic. This training can enhance understanding of citizen rights, development oversight mechanisms, and effective ways to voice aspirations. As noted by Omondi (2023), strengthening citizen capacity significantly contributes to participatory effectiveness, especially in developing countries where information and power disparities remain high. In Barakkae, such training remains limited. However, during one village fund management training conducted by a third party, residents showed enthusiasm. Some housewives even asked how to read village financial reports. This is a positive signal that improved information access and literacy can foster more substantive participation.

Additional observations show that one source of transformative potential is budget transparency. In the past year, the village government began posting infographic summaries of the village budget on public notice boards. Although not yet comprehensive or detailed, this step opens a path toward citizen involvement in development oversight. One resident, M, said that he only learned about a livestock training budget from the village board—but the training was never conducted. This fact cuts both ways: on one hand, it indicates growing citizen awareness, but on the other, it reflects weak program accountability.

These findings collectively emphasize that social transformation toward active citizen participation is contextual, cannot be forced, and requires a gradual approach. Sensitivity to local dynamics is essential, including recognition of value systems and existing power relations. Change cannot be imported solely through training or short-term projects—it must be embedded in the community’s social life.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study affirms that the transition of rural communities from passive beneficiaries to active agents in human resource development does not occur organically but requires comprehensive structural, cultural, and institutional transformations. The findings demonstrate that elite domination in decision-making processes, the absence of inclusive participatory spaces, and weak community-based evaluation mechanisms significantly hinder the emergence of local agency. However, early signs of social transformation are evident in the

critical awareness and grassroots initiatives of younger residents, who have begun organizing independent learning spaces and voicing development aspirations. These dynamics underscore that the potential for transformative change is highly contextual and contingent upon the creation of enabling conditions that respect local socio-cultural complexity. Mechanisms such as open planning forums, citizen advocacy training, and village budget transparency are essential to foster authentic engagement. Thus, empowering communities as development actors requires more than procedural inclusion—it demands systemic interventions that allow them to genuinely influence, shape, and take ownership of their developmental trajectories.

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