



The Role of Agricultural Extension Workers in the Development of Farmer Groups in Tanjung Riu Village, Kurun District, Gunung Mas Regency

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Abstract

Agricultural extension workers play a crucial role in developing farmer groups in Tanjung Riu Village, Kurun District, Gunung Mas Regency. This study aims to understand how agricultural extension workers contribute to the advancement of farmer groups in the area. The research method used is qualitative by conducting in-depth interviews with agricultural extension workers and farmer group members. The results of the study indicate that the participation of farmers in extension activities is still low, the facilities and infrastructure for extension workers are insufficient, and the application of extension materials is inadequate. Therefore, the role of agricultural extension workers is not yet significant in various aspects of the development of farmer groups. Agricultural extension workers not only provide technical guidance on better farming practices but also facilitate training, mobilize resources, and assist in accessing government programs and donor agencies. They also act as a link between farmer groups and markets, promoting collective marketing and raising awareness of the importance of agricultural diversification. Hence, agricultural extension workers hold a crucial role in the development of farmer groups in Tanjung Riu Village, contributing to increased agricultural production, strengthening local economic sustainability, and helping build the capacity and independence of farmers in facing modern challenges. In this context, the strengthening of roles and support for agricultural extension workers is expected to be further enhanced to support the growth and sustainability of the agricultural sector in rural areas.



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INTRODUCTION

Agriculture plays a very important role in Indonesia's economy, especially in rural areas. This is where the role of agricultural extension workers becomes very crucial. Agricultural extension workers function to help farmers form sound opinions and make good decisions. By communicating and providing information tailored to the needs of farmers, they play a key role in increasing agricultural productivity. Extension is more seen as a process of helping farmers to make their own decisions by adding choices for them and helping farmers develop insights into the consequences of each of these choices (Rangkuti 2022).

The role of agricultural extension workers in increasing farm productivity is very apparent. Extension workers conduct outreach to farmers, help solve farm problems, and teach the application of new technological innovations. These innovations are very important to help farmers increase their farm yields. Farmer groups, as a means of cooperation, also play an important role in agricultural development. Farming conducted by each member of the farmer group should be

viewed as a unified effort that can be developed to achieve better economic scale in terms of quantity, quality, and continuity (Permentan Number: 273/Kpts/OT.160/4/2007) [Prayoga et al. 2024] .

However, the reality shows that the welfare of farmers in rural areas is still low. Many farmers are unaware of educational technology, resulting in less than optimal production. Farmers in the village are very eager for change, and the government is very concerned about their education. Practical and easy-to-implement non-formal education becomes a solution to foster independence and community confidence (Hafizah et al. 2024). However, the scale and complexity of the tasks of agricultural extension workers often become challenges, leading to weak interactions between extension workers and farmers, thus causing farmers' perceptions of extension workers to be less favorable (Lastiantoro 2020).

In Indonesia, most of the rural population works in agriculture. Food crops such as rice and vegetables are the mainstays. The development of the agricultural sector, especially the food crop sub-sector, remains a top priority in Tanjung Riu Village, Kurun District. Agriculture not only serves as the main source of income but also as the backbone of the economy and the lives of local communities. The formation of farmer groups in this village is a strategy to increase production and the welfare of farmers. The efforts made by the government include establishing the Agricultural Extension Center (BPP) in the Kurun District area (Mahendra et al. 2024).

Farmer groups in Tanjung Riu Village not only facilitate the exchange of agricultural knowledge and technology but also improve access to capital assistance and markets. Agricultural extension workers play a central role in facilitating the formation and development of farmer groups. They are tasked with providing technical assistance, training, and connecting farmers with the necessary resources and information. Challenges such as limited access to technology, climate change, and capital are still faced, but with the effective support of agricultural extension workers, these challenges can be overcome (Nugraha 2022).

Tanjung Riu Village, Kurun District, Gunung Mas Regency is an area where the majority of the population relies on the agricultural sector for their livelihood. Agriculture is the main support of the local economy and environmental sustainability in the area. The development of farmer groups is a crucial strategy in increasing agricultural productivity and the welfare of farmers. Farmer groups serve as a forum for farmers to share knowledge, experiences, and the latest agricultural technology (Qurniati 2022).

The role of agricultural extension workers in this context is very important. They are not only technical companions for farmers but also connectors between farmers and the government, agricultural research institutions, and markets. Agricultural extension workers play a strategic role in educating, training, and empowering farmers to adopt more modern, efficient, and sustainable farming practices. Therefore, research on the role of agricultural extension workers in the development of farmer groups in Tanjung Riu Village is very relevant (Chairudin & Harahap 2024).

This research aims to understand the important role of agricultural extension workers in the development of farmer groups in Tanjung Riu Village, Kurun District, Gunung Mas Regency. Agriculture is a vital sector in Indonesia's economy, especially in rural areas. Farmer groups are a forum for farmers to increase production, efficiency, and welfare together. However, in practice, various challenges are faced by agricultural extension workers and farmer groups in Tanjung Riu Village (Listyani 2020).

These challenges include limited access to the latest agricultural technology, inadequate infrastructure, and increasingly unpredictable climate changes. Therefore, this research is expected to provide an in-depth understanding of the factors affecting the success of agricultural development programs at the local level and identify effective strategies to address these

challenges. This research is also expected to provide benefits for farmers, the government, and future researchers as a reference and consideration in improving the productivity and welfare of farmers in the future (Rahmah 2019).

METHODOLOGY

Approach and Research Design

This research adopts a qualitative approach with a focus on case studies. This approach is chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of agricultural extension workers in the development of farmer groups in Tanjung Riu Village, Kurun District, Gunung Mas Regency. Case studies allow researchers to explore phenomena in real-life contexts, in this case, the interaction between agricultural extension workers and farmer groups.

Location and Time of Research

This research was conducted in Tanjung Riu Village, Kurun District, Gunung Mas Regency from February to June 2024. The selection of this location is based on the dominance of the agricultural sector in the local economy and the existence of active farmer groups and significant involvement of agricultural extension workers.

Research Informants

The informants in this study numbered 15 people consisting of:

1. 10 Agricultural Extension Workers actively working in Tanjung Riu Village.
2. The Chairman of the Farmer Group in Tanjung Riu Village.
3. 4 Farmer Group members selected based on their active involvement in farmer group activities.

Data Collection Techniques

Data in this study were collected through several techniques, namely:

1. In-depth Interviews: Interviews were conducted directly with the informants to explore information related to the role of agricultural extension workers and the development of farmer groups. The questions were designed to explore the understanding, experiences, and perceptions of the informants regarding the research topic.
2. Participatory Observation: Researchers conducted direct observations of extension activities and farmer group activities. This observation aims to understand the dynamics of interaction between extension workers and farmers, as well as the implementation of agricultural technology and methods applied.
3. Documentation: Secondary data collection was carried out through documentation, which includes data on agricultural extension workers, completeness of farmer group administration, organizational structure, and other related documents. These documents provide important context and background for understanding the structure and operations of farmer groups.

Theoretical Framework

1. Definition of Role

Humans, as individual and social beings, always need others to meet their life's needs. They play roles, which means taking part in their social life. The roles they play distinguish one person from another, so the definition of role can be seen from different perspectives. According to the Indonesian

Dictionary (1990), a role is the part played by an actor. Thus, when someone carries out activities or performs their work, they are fulfilling their role. When someone performs their rights and obligations according to their position, they are executing a role. The importance of a role is because it regulates a person's behavior, and roles enable a person to predict the actions of others to a certain extent. Besides, social relations in society are relationships between the roles of individuals in the community governed by prevailing norms. According to the Directorate General of Rural Development (1992:7), a role is an activity that has meaning as a pioneer, innovator, and driver.

2. Definition of Agricultural Extension Worker

According to the Agricultural Extension Work Plan Book (2005), an extension worker is someone who has a role, task, or profession that provides education, guidance, or information to the community to address various issues, such as in agriculture, to achieve established targets.

3. Definition of Agriculture

According to the Indonesian Dictionary (1990), agriculture comes from the word "tani," which refers to a livelihood in the form of farming or a livelihood involving cultivating land through planting.

4. Definition of Development

The term development, in simple terms, is a process of change from a previously non-existent state to an existent state or a change to a better state than before.

Role of Agricultural Extension Workers in Development

- ## 5. Agricultural development carried out by Agricultural Extension Workers (AEWs) is a role because of their obligation and position to guide farmers and farmer groups. Those who previously did not know and understand good farming practices are expected to manage their farming better and achieve increased yields through guidance by AEWs. This is because the role of AEWs in agriculture is as a pioneer, innovator, and driver in the context of agricultural development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In performing their roles, Agricultural Extension Workers (AEWs) do not stand alone because institutionally, AEWs are under the Department of Agriculture. AEWs play a role in implementing programs established by the Gunung Mas Regency Government through the Department of Agriculture, as listed in the Annual Budget Implementation List (DPA) of the Department of Agriculture. For the success of the program, AEWs are obliged to guide farmers and farmer groups according to the established program. The role of Agricultural Extension Workers in supporting agricultural development in Tanjung Riu Village, Kurun District includes:

Creating a Work Plan

All Agricultural Extension Workers (AEWs) are required to create work plans as guidelines for carrying out activities that constitute their main duties. These work plans include the day, time, date, activity targets, and materials delivered to farmers or farmer groups. According to the Head of the Department of Agriculture of Gunung Mas Regency, AEWs' work programs are daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly to determine the direction and targets as well as activities to be

implemented by the extension workers to farmers or farmer groups in their respective assigned areas. This work program is important for evaluating the performance of extension workers for the purpose of performance appraisal at the end of each year.

Work Plan Discussion

The AEWs' work plans are institutionally discussed with officials in the Department of Agriculture of Gunung Mas Regency. This discussion aims to ensure that the materials in the AEWs' work plans align with the targets set by the Department of Agriculture. The purpose of this discussion is to ensure that the extension activities carried out by AEWs are on target, so they align with the achievement targets of the Department of Agriculture and Food Security of Gunung Mas Regency.

Research Findings

The participation of extension workers and farmers in fostering cooperation can help explore potential, solve farming problems, and facilitate access to market information, technology, capital, and other resources. An interview with Mrs. Nomeri, SP, an extension worker, revealed the importance of the presence of extension workers:

"Our role is very important in mobilizing and organizing farmer groups in Tanjung Riu Village. We help educate farmers about modern agricultural techniques, resource management, and marketing strategies. With this, farmer groups can become more independent and competitive."

Mrs. Nomeri, SP, added:

"As Agricultural Extension Workers, we bridge farmer groups with government institutions, markets, and financial institutions to ensure they get better access to the resources, technology, and funding needed to increase production and income." She also highlighted the expected impact of extension activities on farmers:

"The presence of well-organized farmer groups not only increases agricultural production but also impacts local economic development. This creates additional job opportunities and improves the welfare of farmers."

The interview results indicate that challenges still exist, such as limited resources and accessibility. Extension workers need support from the government and the community to improve the quality of life for farmers and the sustainability of agriculture in Tanjung Riu Village. The low participation of farmers in the capacity-building process also remains a challenge.

Farmer Group Development

The development of farmer groups is assessed based on administrative completeness, organizational structure, capital (group funds), cooperation and meetings, as well as farming business development. The farmer groups in Tanjung Riu Village are supported by two AEWs. The distribution of extension workers in each Agricultural Extension Center and village supports activities such as inventory and identification of regional potential, dissemination of agricultural

information, fostering and enhancing the capacity level of Farmer Groups (Poktan) and Combined Farmer Groups (Gapoktan), as well as capacity-building activities for Poktan, Gapoktan, and Farmer Economic Institutions (KEP).

Role of Extension Workers in Farmer Group Development in Tanjung Riu Village

This research uses indicators of the role of extension workers developed by Sianturi (2019), namely motivator, educator, dynamisator, facilitator, and innovator.

1. Motivator

As a motivator, the agricultural extension worker inspires and motivates farmers to face challenges and achieve their goals in agriculture. According to Nomeri, SP:

"As an extension worker, I see myself as the main motivator for farmers. I strive to inspire them to remain enthusiastic and confident in facing agricultural challenges."

2. Educator

As an educator, the agricultural extension worker provides knowledge, skills, and the latest information to farmers. Nomeri, SP, stated:

"My role as an educator is very crucial. I not only provide technical knowledge about agriculture but also teach farmers about sustainable and efficient farming practices"

3. Dynamisator

As a dynamisator, the agricultural extension worker builds cooperation and collaboration among farmers in the farmer group. Nomeri, SP, responded:

" As a dynamisator, I play a role in facilitating collaboration among farmers and developing a more solid farmer group"

4. Fasilitator

As a facilitator, the extension worker facilitates farmers' access to various needed resources. Nomeri SP conveyed:

"As a facilitator, I build networks between farmer groups and local government, financial institutions, and markets."

5. Inovator

As an innovator, the extension worker identifies and introduces new technologies, methods, or strategies that can improve agricultural efficiency, productivity, and sustainability. According to Nomeri SP:

" As an innovator, I encourage the adoption of modern agricultural technologies and practices."

The results of interviews and analysis indicate that the role of agricultural extension workers in supporting the development of farmer groups in Tanjung Riu Village is very vital. The roles as motivator, educator, dynamisator, facilitator, and innovator reflect the various important roles played by extension workers in supporting the development of farmer groups, from motivation and education to collaboration and innovation.

CONCLUSION

From the study of the role of agricultural extension workers in the development of farmer groups in Tanjung Riu Village, Kurun District, Gunung Mas Regency, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Level of Role of Agricultural Extension Workers: The level of role of agricultural extension workers in the development of farmer groups in Tanjung Riu Village, Kurun District, Gunung Mas Regency is very high. This indicates that agricultural extension workers play a very significant role in advancing farmer groups in the region.
2. Relationship of the Role of Agricultural Extension Workers in the Development of Farmer Groups:
 - Facilitator, Motivator, and Dynamisator: There is a significant relationship between the role of agricultural extension workers as facilitators, motivators, and dynamisators with the level of development of farmer groups in Tanjung Riu Village. This indicates that these roles directly influence the success and development level of farmer groups in the region.
 - Innovator and Educator: There is no significant relationship between the role of agricultural extension workers as innovators and educators with the level of development of farmer groups in Tanjung Riu Village. This indicates that the role as innovator and educator does not directly affect the level of development of farmer groups in the region.

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