

EMPOWERMENT OF VILLAGE COMMUNITIES IN PROCUREMENT OF ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE IN PEMATANG KUING VILLAGE, SEI SUKA DISTRICT, BATU BARA REGENCY

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Abstract

This study aims to analyse community empowerment in the procurement of road infrastructure in Pematang Kuing Village, Sei Suka Sub-district, Batu Bara Regency. Road infrastructure plays a vital role in improving accessibility, supporting economic activities, and strengthening rural welfare. Following the implementation of Law No. 6 of 2014 on Villages, rural communities are positioned as subjects of development who are encouraged to participate actively in every stage of village development, including planning, execution, and maintenance of road infrastructure. The study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive case-study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, documentation, and field notes. Informants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling, comprising the Village Head, village officials, the Village Consultative Body (BPD), community leaders, and beneficiary residents directly involved in road development. Data were analysed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman. The findings show that community empowerment in road procurement is realised through participation in village deliberation, the involvement of local labour through gotong royong and labour-intensive programmes, and community engagement in monitoring and maintenance. Supporting factors include strong social capital, the Village Fund policy framework, and communicative village leadership. Inhibiting factors comprise budget limitations, technical constraints, and suboptimal management capacity. The study concludes that strengthening institutional capacity, transparency, and meaningful participation is essential for sustainable road infrastructure outcomes at the village level.

Keywords: *Community Empowerment; Community Participation; Village Road Infrastructure; Village Fund; Sustainable Village Development*

INTRODUCTION

Infrastructure development in Indonesian villages is a key pillar for equity and improving the welfare of rural communities. Since the enactment of Law Number 6 of 2014 concerning Villages, villages have shifted from being objects to subjects of development, empowered to participate in the planning, implementation, and maintenance processes (Republic of Indonesia, 2014). The central government allocated Rp 71 trillion in Village Funds for the 2025 fiscal year for all villages in Indonesia, with priority being given to basic infrastructure development, including village roads (Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia, 2024). This budget scale serves as a strategic instrument for equitable access and strengthening local economies.

The concept of participatory and community-based development is gaining increasing attention. Empowerment focuses not solely on physical development but also on strengthening the capacity of residents to participate in decision-making, implementation, and maintenance of development outcomes (Tampubolon, 2024; Rochdati & Achyani, 2025). Previous studies have noted that Village Funds have a significant impact on physical development and community empowerment (Rochdati & Achyani, 2025), while also serving as an instrument for poverty alleviation in rural areas (Anisa, Noor, & Nugroho, 2024). However, local challenges persist,

including damaged village roads, inadequate inter-hamlet access, and suboptimal community participation (Zubaidah et al., 2024).

Most previous studies have focused on the physical implementation or financial management of Village Funds. Studies that comprehensively examine community empowerment, including planning, implementation, monitoring, and maintenance, using the theoretical framework of empowerment, participation (Cohen and Uphoff; Arnstein), and sustainable village development, are still relatively limited. Case studies in North Sumatra, particularly Batu Bara Regency, are also scarce.

Pematang Kuing Village, Sei Suka District, Batu Bara Regency, was chosen as the research location. This village actively implements road infrastructure procurement by involving the community through village deliberations, self-help, mutual cooperation, and labor-intensive programs. The condition of the village's road infrastructure presents several challenges, including suboptimal inter-hamlet access, a high level of road damage, and its impact on agricultural product distribution, community mobility, and access to social services. These conditions position Pematang Kuing Village as a relevant location for examining the dynamics of community empowerment in village road procurement.

Based on this background, this research aims to address four issues. First, describe the forms of community empowerment in village road procurement. Second, identify the roles of local actors, namely the village government, community leaders, and community groups. Third, analyze the supporting and inhibiting factors in implementing empowerment. Fourth, understand the social and economic impacts of empowerment on community well-being and sustainable development. The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive analysis of the stages of empowerment, using a dual theoretical framework within the context of rural villages in North Sumatra.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research type and a single case study design (Roosinda et al., 2021; Poltak & Widjaja, 2024). The qualitative approach was chosen because the study focused on an in-depth understanding of the community empowerment process in road procurement, namely the social dynamics, meanings, perceptions, and values held by the community. The single case study was chosen considering that Pematang Kuing Village has unique characteristics in community participation and development implementation. The research location was selected purposively in Pematang Kuing Village, Sei Suka District, Batu Bara Regency, North Sumatra Province. The research area scheme is presented in Figure 1. The

research was conducted from March to May 2025.

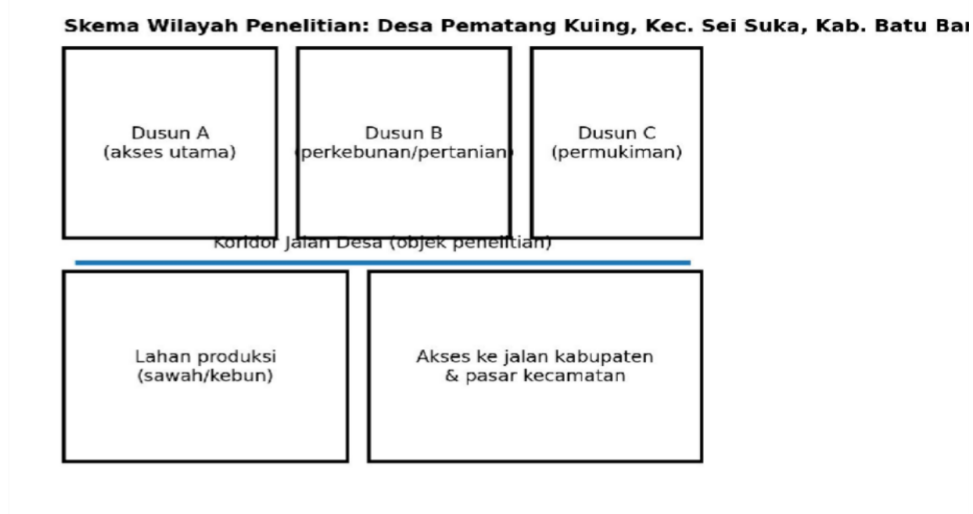


Figure 1. Scheme of the research area of Pematang Kuing Village

Informants were determined through a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling (Asrulla, Jailani, & Jeka, 2023). The composition of informants is presented in Table 1. Data collection was conducted using four complementary techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, documentation, and field notes (Zahroh et al., 2025; Sari, Aprisilia, & Fitriani, 2025). The documentation study included the RPJMDes, RKPDes, APBDes, minutes of deliberations, and development realization reports.

Table 1. Composition of Research Informants

No	Group/Position	Roles in Road Empowerment and Procurement
1	Pematang Kuing Village Head	Holding authority for planning and decision-making
2	Village Officials	Executing administration and coordinating activities
3	BPD Chairperson	Executing administration and coordinating activities
4	Community and Traditional Leaders	Supervising implementation and channeling community aspirations
5	Working Group Members (Pokja)	Field implementers of road construction activities
6	Beneficiary Residents	Assessment of development impacts

Source: Processed by researchers (2025).

Data analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, encompassing data reduction, data presentation, conclusion drawing, and verification. Data validity was maintained through source and technique triangulation. The analytical framework incorporates three theoretical perspectives: community empowerment, participation (Cohen and Uphoff and Arnstein), and sustainable rural development. The research conceptual framework is presented in Figure 2.

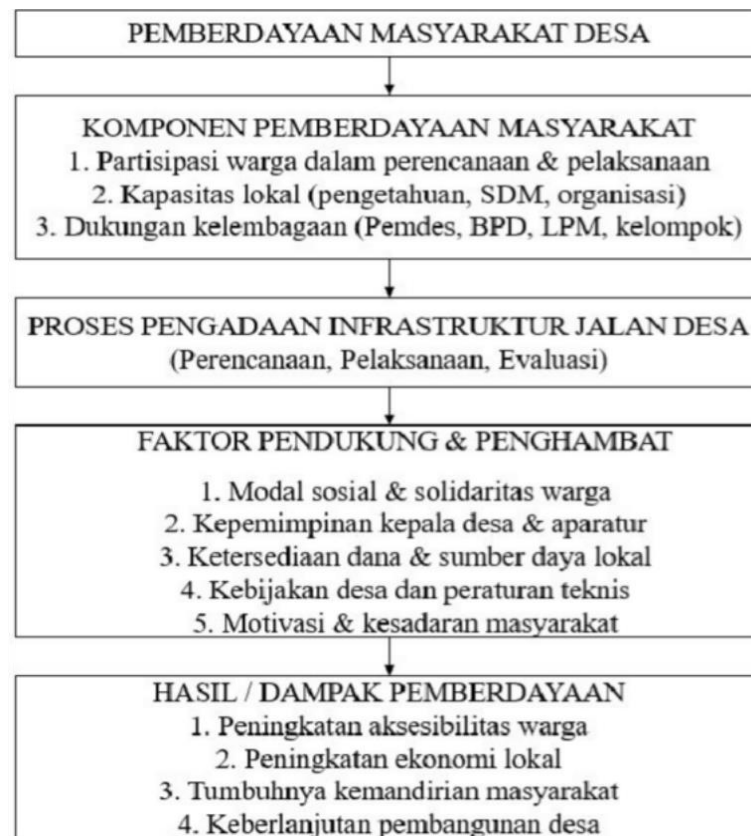


Figure 2. Conceptual framework for community empowerment in the procurement of village road infrastructure

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Road Infrastructure Procurement Process and Forms of Empowerment

The procurement of village roads in Pematang Kuing involved three main stages: planning through hamlet and village deliberations, implementation using a labor-intensive self-management model, and monitoring and maintenance. During the planning stage, the community was involved in hamlet deliberations to identify needs, and then proposals were brought to the village deliberations to be formulated in the Village Work Plan (RKPDDes) and Village Budget (APBDDes). During the implementation stage, labor-intensive programs utilizing local labor were the dominant model, supported by community-based mutual cooperation (gotong royong) for light tasks such as road clearing and material preparation.

The forms of empowerment identified encompassed three dimensions. First, participation in decision-making, namely the presence and voice of residents in planning deliberations. Second, labor participation, through direct involvement in labor-intensive work and mutual cooperation. Third, participation in supervision and maintenance, which emerged from informal agreements among residents to maintain development outcomes. These findings align with a study by Tampubolon (2024), which defines empowerment as a process of strengthening community capacity, not simply mobilizing labor.

Tingkat Partisipasi dan Peran Aktor Lokal

Visualization of participation intensity at four stages of activity is presented in Figure 3. The pattern that emerged shows high participation in implementation, moderate participation in planning, and relatively weak participation in supervision and maintenance.

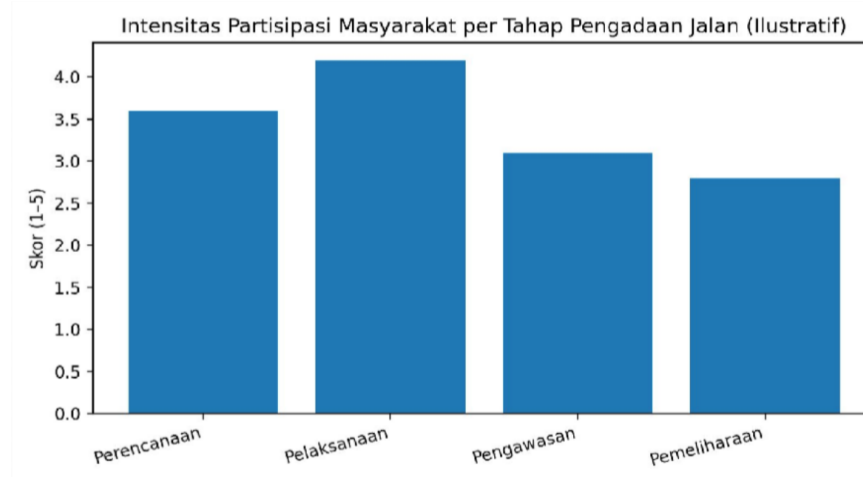


Figure 3. Diagram of the intensity of community participation per stage of road procurement

This participation pattern aligns with the findings of Pitriyati et al. (2019) that community participation in physical implementation is typically higher than in decision-making and evaluation. From Arnstein's perspective, this situation implies the risk of tokenism if village deliberations do not have a substantive influence on the final decision. Therefore, improving participation design is crucial, with an emphasis on information transparency, clear priority criteria, and evaluation mechanisms accessible to residents.

The role of local actors is divided into four layers. The village government acts as a facilitator and guarantor of standard procedures. The Village Consultative Body (BPD) carries out oversight and represents the community in deliberations. The Community Empowerment Institution and community groups play a role in organizing participation at the hamlet level. Community and traditional leaders maintain the social legitimacy of the decision-making process, ensuring that vulnerable groups are not marginalized from deliberation forums.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Supporting factors for empowerment rest on social capital and policy support. Social capital is realized through a culture of mutual cooperation, kinship networks, and norms of mutual assistance that encourage residents to contribute even without direct financial incentives. This social capital serves as a low "transaction cost," enabling rapid coordination, high trust, and easily resolved conflicts through informal mechanisms. Policy support emerges through the Village Fund framework, which allows villages to set development priorities based on local needs (Wahyu, Susanti, & Rahmat, 2024; Putri, Andiny, Safuridar, & Martahadi, 2024).

The leadership of the village head is a key factor bridging social capital and policy. Communicative leadership broadens participation because residents feel valued and information is not hidden. Actors at the hamlet level, namely hamlet heads, religious leaders, and farmer group administrators, contribute to strengthening the process by linking residents' micro-needs to the village agenda.

Inhibiting factors exist in four areas. First, budget constraints require gradual road construction, despite the urgent needs of residents. Second, technical obstacles related to weather conditions, drainage, and material quality, particularly in flood-prone areas. Third, limited capacity of local officials and institutions in developing work plans, quality control, and proper documentation (Subhi, Kurniawan, & Tanjung, 2024). Fourth, cross-actor coordination can be disrupted if there are differing interests between hamlets or social groups. Latent conflicts typically relate to prioritization of road segments, distribution of work opportunities, or perceptions of budget transparency.

Impact on Sustainability and Citizen Well-being

The impacts of empowerment are divided into two domains: direct impacts on accessibility and indirect impacts on socio-economic dynamics. Direct impacts include reduced travel time between hamlets, smoother distribution of agricultural and plantation products, and improved access to public services. In practice, residents benefit when production routes become more accessible, resulting in lower transportation costs and a reduced risk of commodity damage. This finding aligns with Zam (2025)'s finding that rural infrastructure development contributes to poverty reduction and improved welfare.

Indirect impacts are evident in strengthening social cohesion and fostering a sense of ownership of village assets. When residents are involved in planning and implementation, they are more likely to maintain development outcomes. This sense of ownership is a crucial component of empowerment theory because it demonstrates the transformation from dependency to independence. In the context of sustainability, community-based maintenance extends the life of infrastructure and reduces reliance on recurring repair budgets.

The synthesis of findings indicates that empowerment is most evident in the involvement of labor-intensive and mutual cooperation programs, while strengthening is still needed at the decision-making and evaluation stages to ensure residents remain in the position of "implementers." The theoretical implication is that empowerment cannot be limited to the mobilization of mutual cooperation. Empowerment should be understood as the division of decision-making space and social control. When social control is strengthened, accountability increases, job quality is maintained, and the benefits of development are more equitable.

CLOSING

Conclusion

Community empowerment in road procurement in Pematang Kuing Village was realized through participation in village deliberations, the involvement of local labor through labor-intensive programs and mutual cooperation (gotong royong), and community involvement in monitoring and maintenance. Key supporting factors include social capital, Village Fund policy support, and communicative leadership. Inhibiting factors include budget limitations, technical constraints, suboptimal management capacity, and variable inter-sectoral coordination. Empowerment has had a positive impact on accessibility, the local economy, and development sustainability, although strengthening participation in decision-making is still needed.

Recommendations

The village government needs to expand the space for meaningful participation at the decision-making stage, establish transparent development priority criteria, and establish SOPs for quality control and documentation. The Village Consultative Body (BPD) needs to strengthen its oversight function through a monitoring schedule and regular evaluation forums. Community groups should be encouraged to organize participation at the hamlet level and maintain the sustainability of road maintenance. The sub-district and district governments need to provide technical assistance and ongoing activity management training. Further research is recommended, including comparative studies of several villages in Batu Bara Regency and using quantitative instruments to measure participation intensity more precisely.

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