

Optimizing farmer capacity through improved group management and administration

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Abstract

Building farmer groups has the potential to enhance both administrative and organizational management, as well as the technical aspects of agriculture. Weak institutional management can hinder the efficiency and effectiveness of farmer groups in carrying out agricultural activities. One of the weaknesses in the institutional management of farmer groups is related to the organizational structure, management, and coordination among group members. The Baleubat Dua farmer group in Cidewa Hamlet Dewasari Village Handap Herang District, Ciamis Regency is the object of community service activities related to institutional management of farmer groups with a total of 20 members of farmers and breeders. The method of approach is by conducting counseling and discussions related to the obstacles faced by farmer groups in terms of management and institutions that farmers want to know and the solutions provided to build more professional and competent farmer groups. The activity's outcomes demonstrated that participants were highly engaged in counselling activities, resulting in two-way contact between the communicator and the participants. The communicator's questions, suggestions, and productive conversations substantially aided this activity. The implementation of good management will strengthen collaboration among farmer group members and open up opportunities for diversification of farming businesses.

Keywords: administration, agriculture, farmer groups, management extension

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INTRODUCTION

Strengthening Farmer Groups is an important step in improving farmers' welfare. Farmer groups are effective platforms to exchange information, experiences, and resources in order to improve productivity and welfare. However, many farmer groups do not fully have strong and competent institutional capacity to manage agricultural businesses independently and sustainably. Efforts can be made by farmers to cooperate economically, increase access to capital, and develop human resource through capacity mentoring and training (Hermanto & Swastika, 2016).

Extension on improving the institutional competence of farmer groups aims to strengthen the structure and management of farmer groups so as to optimize existing resources. By improving the organizational and management capabilities of farmer groups, it is expected to increase agricultural productivity, reduce dependence on external parties, and encourage the sustainability of farming businesses through more efficient and effective management. This extension also plays an important role equipping farmer groups with knowledge of the latest agricultural technology, marketing of farm products, and good financial management.

Extension Agricultural plays an important role in improving the institutional competence of farmer groups. Through non-formal, extension aims to change farmer behaviour to improve knowledge, skills, and decision-making (Apriyani et al., 2024). Strengthening farmer groups is done by encouraging economic cooperation, increasing access to capital, and developing farmers' human resource capacity (Hermanto &



Swastika, 2016). Good institutional competence will increase the ability of farmer groups to plan, manage, and develop agricultural businesses, both in terms of production, marketing, and financing. A crucial first step in enhancing farmers' welfare and negotiating power is the institutionalization of farmer associations (Hermanto & Swastika, 2016).

This begins with the institutionalization of raising awareness of farmer groups, which encourages each farmer to participate in group activities and consider the interests of a group of farmers rather than their own (Yolanda Holle, 2022). Institutional strengthening can be done through increasing human resource, facilitating access to capital, and organizational coaching (Hermanto & Swastika, 2016). This effort includes strengthening understanding of administrative, financial and technical management of farm businesses (Hasan et al., 2021).

Although farmer groups have a great potential to support agricultural progress, many of them are still limited in terms of knowledge, skills and adequate institutional management. Extension is one effective way to overcome these limitations, by providing insights and training that can increase the capacity and competitiveness of farmer groups. Participatory such as Participatory Action Research and Focus Group Discussions can approaches help farmers identify problems and formulate solutions (Nurrachman et al., 2022)

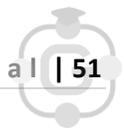
Building farmer groups capacity has the ability to improve administrative, financial, and organizational management in addition to the technical aspects of agriculture. With counselling, farmer group members are expected to better understand the importance of good collaboration in group management, and can develop strategies to increase the productivity and efficiency of farming. Collaboration in farmer groups has an important role in increasing farmers' productivity and income (Wibawanti et al., 2022). Farmer groups function as a vehicle for learning, a vehicle for cooperation, and unit production (Riani et al., 2021). Extension programs are expected to encourage farmer groups to be more independent in managing their agricultural businesses, take advantage of existing market opportunities, and access technology and financing that can support their business development.

One of the weaknesses in the institutional management of the Baleubat Dua farmer relates to the organizational structure management coordination between members in the group. Weak institutional management can hinder the efficiency and effectiveness of farmer groups in carrying out agricultural activities. Farmer groups need to have a clear organizational structure, effective leadership, good planning, and a management system that can support the management of agricultural activities more efficiently and sustainably. Extension and training in institutional management are needed so that farmer groups can improve these weaknesses. Thus, extension programs on capacity building of building farmer groups have a very strategic role in more professional and competent farmer groups, which in turn will contribute to improving farmers' welfare and better food security in Dewasari Village, Cijeungjing Subdistrict, Ciamis Regency.

METHODS

The Baleubat Dua Farmer Group in Cidewa Hamlet, Dewasari Village, Cijeungjing Ciamis District, Regency was the target of this service counseling. The strategy of providing information and debates about the challenges that farmer groups encounter with regard to institutions and management that farmers are interested in, as well as the answers offered to create more capable and professional farmer groups.

Based on the situation of institutional administration found in the field, most of the administrative governance owned by farmers actually exists, but has not been well managed. The records are only written in one book and do not follow the standardized suggested book format. Starting with training on farmer group organization management. This training discusses the organization of farmer groups, which is regulated in the Articles of Association (AD) and Bylaws (ART) of Farmer Groups and Farmer Group Administration.



The method of implementing the training used is namely in accordance with MOA No. 37/SM.120/8/2018 on Guidelines for Agricultural Training *Experiential Learning Cycle* (ELC) or AKOSA (Experience, Articulate, Explore, Conclude, Apply) with an adult learning *approach/Andragogy* which is renewable.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Twenty farmers and breeders participated in the extension activities for this community service program at the Baleubat Dua Farmer Group in Hamlet Cidewa Dewasari Village, Cibeunjing District, Ciamis Regency. In general, members of the Baleubat Dua farmer group are involved in livestock, horticulture, and food crops. Through farmer group institutions, it is hoped that there will be an increase in income and market guarantees for the products produced.

Based on the results of field identification, the Baleubat Dua Farmer Group experiences several obstacles related to various factors that affect the efficiency and sustainability of the group itself, namely: Many farmer group members lack skills in management, agricultural techniques, or new technologies. This can hinder the progress and productivity of the group, managers are farmer group also often untrained in managerial aspects such as planning, organizing, supervising, and evaluating group activities, groups farmer often have difficulty gaining access to capital or financing needed to improve infrastructure or purchase more efficient tools and machinery, credit or loans from financial institutions are usually difficult to access by small farmers or farmer groups that do not have collateral or clear financial records.

Furthermore, from the aspect of marketing agricultural products that are still limited, . Unstable price also make farmers' income unpredictable, and can even harm them. many Baleubat Dua farmer groups find it difficult to market products at favorable prices due to limited distribution channels and marketing networks fluctuations

Farmer groups frequently have issues with organizational administration, with members weak coordination among members. This leads to confusion in decision-making or program implementation, conflicts between group members caused by differences of opinion or personal interests often disrupt the smooth running of the program. Low level of member participation: Some farmer group members may be less active or reluctant to engage in group activities. This can reduce the effectiveness and productivity of the group in running joint programs or projects, and the lack of awareness of the importance of cooperation and collaboration among members can affect the spirit to work together to achieve common goals.

The material presented included the role and function of farmer groups, basic principles that must be applied, strengthening the capacity of human resources, and managing the administrative system in farmer groups.



Figure 1 Farmer Group Institutional and Administrative Counseling

Farmer Group Function

The function of farmer groups is very important in supporting the success of members' agricultural businesses. This material discusses in depth more the various functions carried out by farmer groups, including:



- 1) **Improved Member Welfare:** Farmer groups provide direct benefits in the form of increased income and quality of life for farmers. Through cooperation in purchasing raw materials or selling agricultural products together, members can get more favourable prices.
- 2) **Exchange of Knowledge and Experience:** One of the main functions of farmer groups is to share information and experience among farmers. Farmer groups provide a place for members to learn about the latest farming techniques, effective crop management, and how to overcome problems encountered in farming.
- 3) **Improved Access to Resources:** Farmer groups also serve to facilitate their members' access to greater resources, such as capital, farming tools, improved seeds and access to government policies or broader markets.
- 4) **Collective Decision Making:** In farmer groups, important decisions about farming activities are made collectively. This includes decisions on the type of crops to be planted, the schedule, and the sharing of farm produce. A participatory and democratic decision-making is essential so that all members feel included and benefit.

Farmer Group Principles

The basic principles that must be applied in the management of farmer groups include several things that are fundamental to maintaining group harmony and effectiveness, namely:

- 1) **Togetherness and Solidarity:** In a farmer group, all members are expected to work together, help and support each other in good times and bad. This togetherness strengthens the spirit of mutual cooperation and helps create an environment conducive to the sustainable growth of agricultural enterprises.
- 2) **Active Participation:** Each member is expected to actively participate in every group activity, whether in planning, implementation or evaluation. This active participation creates a sense of belonging and shared responsibility for the group's goals.
- 3) **Honesty and Transparency:** It is important to maintain transparency in every administrative and financial process of the farmer group. All members should have equal access to information about the group's activities and financial management, so that there is no abuse or injustice.
- 4) **Fairness and Equality:** All group members should be treated fairly, both in terms of the distribution of tasks, benefits, and decisions made by the group. This is to ensure that there is no discrimination among members, and everyone has the same opportunity to grow.

Strengthening the Human Resources of Farmer Groups

Strengthening human resources (HR) in farmer groups is one of the important pillars to ensure the group's long-term success. This material explores various aspects related to developing the skills and capacity of farmer group members, such as:

- 1) **Improved Agricultural Skills:** Technical skills such as efficient planting, proper fertilizer use, natural pest control, and good irrigation techniques are areas that need to be improved. Training and extension services related to the latest agricultural technologies are essential to ensure farmers can take advantage of the innovations.
- 2) **Managerial and Leadership Skills:** In addition to technical skills, strengthening managerial skills is also very important. Farmer groups need members who are able to lead, manage resources, and plan activities well. Therefore, training in leadership, communication, and time and financial management is necessary.
- 3) **Entrepreneurship and Financial Management:** Strengthening entrepreneurial capacity is also an important part of this material. Farmer group members are expected to understand how to manage finances, calculate production costs, and plan budgets to increase the profitability of their businesses. In addition, it is important to understand how to open access to markets and market agricultural products well.
- 4) **Women and Youth:** Empowerment Farmer groups also need to pay attention to the empowerment of women and youth in farming. By providing specialized training and equal opportunities, farmer



groups can open up wider opportunities for women and youth to play a role in the agricultural sector and increase their capacity.

Farmer Group Administration System

This material discusses the importance of implementing a structured and effective administrative system in farmer groups. A good administration system will help farmer groups manage all activities and data, as well as facilitate monitoring and evaluation. Some of the things discussed in this material include:

- 1) **Recording Activities and Finances:** Farmer groups need to have a neat system to record all activities conducted, from member meetings, field activities, to product purchases and sales. In addition, transparent and detailed financial records are also very important, such as expenses for the purchase of seeds, fertilizers, equipment, as well as income from the sale of agricultural products.
- 2) **Report Preparation:** Every farmer group should be able to prepare clear and structured reports, be it financial reports, activity, or evaluation reports. These reports are not only used to monitor the development of the group, but also as a means to gain support from external parties, such as government agencies or financial institutions.
- 3) **Resource and Inventory Management:** The administration system also includes the management of resources owned by the farmer group, such as farm equipment, transportation, and another inventory. Good management will ensure that these resources are used efficiently and appropriately.
- 4) **Technology Utilization:** In today's digital era, farmer groups are also encouraged to utilize information technology in their administration. The use of farmer group management applications or software for recording and reporting can greatly help in improving the efficiency and accuracy of group data management.

Extension administration involves cooperation between various parties to achieve extension objectives, with attention to functions such as personnel, equipment, finance, reporting and relationships with related institutions (Zulkifli & Sibuea, 2022). An in-depth understanding of these aspects is expected to enable farmer groups to operate more professionally, efficiently, and sustainably, which in turn will improve the welfare of their members. Participants were highly engaged in the extension activities, resulting in two-way communication, both from and to the participants, who provided input, questions, and constructive discussions that greatly supported the success of this program. The interaction strengthened participants' understanding of the material presented and increased the effectiveness of the application of agricultural sector knowledge. The, interactive approach encourages constructive discussions, questions and feedback improving participants' understanding of the material presented (Ridwan et al., 2019; Wulandari et al., 2024).

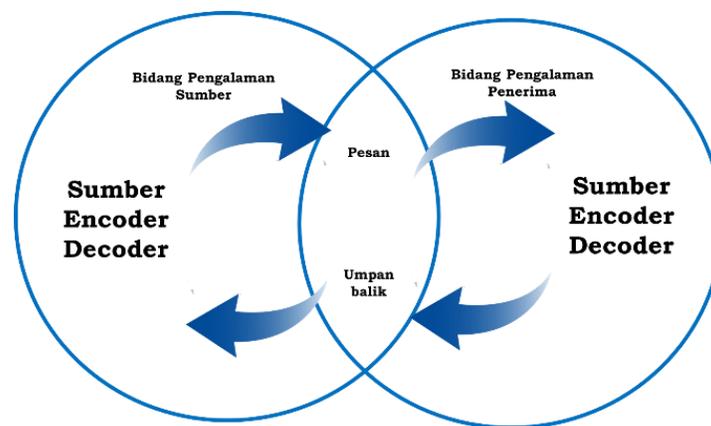
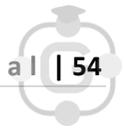


Figure 1. Communication interaction process



The extension activities carried out provide benefits and evaluations to participants, because they can help improve farmer group management and administration and support farm diversification. Extension provides great benefits in increasing the capacity of farmer groups in various aspects of farming, both in management, techniques, and business diversification which will ultimately make farmers more independent and more competitive in farming. Evaluation of extension activities is important to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the program and provide directions for improvement Lisnawati et al., 2019).

A continuation of this extension program is the practical implementation of farmer group administration, which aims to improve the cluster and quality of farmer groups. This program is critical to ensure that farmer group members not only gain knowledge, but are also able to implement the skills they have learned.

CONCLUSION

Optimizing farmers' capacity through improved farmer group management and administration is an important step in developing more effective and sustainable agricultural sector. By improving management and administration, farmer groups can improve financial management, organization, and recording of agricultural activities that are more structured and transparent, thereby strengthening the competitiveness and productivity of agricultural products. The implementation of good management will strengthen collaboration among farmer group members and open up opportunities for diversification of farming businesses.

Limitations and future directions

Community Service programs need to focus on creating long-term impacts that can be felt by the community in a sustainable manner. Limitations from previous community service, such as limited time or resources, can be overcome by building a sustainability model that actively involves the community, so that they can continue and manage the results of the service.

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