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# ROWING THE WEAVES OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION: GOOD PRACTICES IN EARLYCHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (ECD) PROGRAM IN RURAL CENTRAL LOMBOK, WEST NUSA TENGGARA

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## ABSTRACT

This paper describes the rural community participation within the context of an integrated early childhood development program initiated by the government of Indonesia in partnership with UNICEF and AusAID in Central Lombok (2008 - 2010). Based on purposive interviews with relevant stakeholders, as well as an analysis of past documents, researchers' involvement, and current policies and practices, both at the local government and rural community levels, the paper draws key good practices for possible application in other similar programs for rural settings.

Central Lombok is situated in West Nusa Tenggara Province, which according to the National Statistics Bureau's 2010 Report, holds the lowest Human Development Index in Indonesia. Among ten districts within the province, Central Lombok has the third lowest index. Rural population, which accounts for more than half of the total district population, contributes to this overall low quality of human development. Over the past five years, rigorous development programs including early childhood education and health have been directed towards rural areas, both in land and around the coasts. The integrated early childhood development partnership targeted a far-south coastal area called Kuta, which the local government endeavours to transform into a major tourism destination.

The partnership program sought to empower early childhood health centres by inserting early childhood education programs for toddlers and their parents. The centres were established by the District Health Office, but irregular DHO's follow up support and lack of community's engagement had caused most centres to a non-functioning status. Throughout the life of the program, community participation was progressively placed at the centre of implementation and monitoring. The partnership drew three key good practices that enabled program ownership and sustainability. The first good practice was rigorous investment in grass root leadership through participatory selection, training, close mentoring, and small incentive scheme. The second good practice was formation of a sub-village cluster system that answered the issues related to distance and unavailability of public transport, and in turn allowed non-costly and more intensive community engagement. The third good practice was facilitating the establishment of a micro cooperative that generated income for the centres' stakeholders, and provided financial support for centres' daily operation. Today, two years after the partnership program concluded, the centres owned fully by the community continue to serve the children of Kuta. Beyond that, District Health and Education Offices have worked together to replicate some components of the program to other rural areas in Central Lombok.

## INTRODUCTION

Irwanto et al. (2011, p.1) have indicated that in line with the international commitment on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and actualization of A World Fit for Children, the Indonesian Government has established a holistic model of the community based Early Childhood Development. This model is considered suitable to Indonesia due to its geographic and demographic characteristics.

In the education sector, the second MDGs emphasize that by 2015, children everywhere-boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. It aims at equipping people with foundation literacy and numeracy to survive (United Nations' MDGs Report 2012). Therefore primary education is considered significant in two ways. Firstly, this is the foundation phase of survival skills such as thinking and problem solving skills. Secondly, as part of people in the world can only access primary education, this is important that skills delivered in it are successfully commanded by the learners. At the initial phase, this involves whether or not learners' level of school readiness is good. The role of early child education is therefore significant. In many parts of the worlds, studies show children receiving assistance in their early years have greater chance to survive and higher achievement level at school.

On the other hand, financial resource can be a hindrance. Despite the national economic growth, there are more than 30 millions Indonesian citizens who lived with less than US\$1 per day-whom most of them live in rural areas (Indonesia's last national census of 2010). This affects mindset of people to pursue education. Supeno (2011, p.3) brought some findings in his rural education research in West Nusa Tenggara Province-including the regency of Lombok Tengah that poverty remains one of the major factors basic education children not to attend/drop out from schools. He explains further that cultural factors and the lack of parental are some causes making the large number of children not attend the school. It implies a research necessity to reveal what cultural factor changes and what economical strategies needed to support the access of education and equalization to education opportunities. Hence, the successful rural community participation contributing to the second MGDs such as an integrated early childhood development program initiated by the government of Indonesia in partnership with UNICEF and Aus AID in Kuta, Central Lombok during 2008 – 2010 is worth sharing. The emphasis lies on what good practices contribute to the achievement of programme and what challenges need to be further tackled.

This paper is qualitative in nature, based on an analysis of past documents, researchers' involvement, and current policies and practices, both at the local government and rural community levels. Purposive interviews with relevant stakeholders are carried out to tackle triangulation. It aims at drawing key good practices for possible application in other similar programs for rural settings.

### ***Central Lombok Demography***

Central Lombok is one of the districts situated in West Nusa Tenggara Province. According to the latest Indonesian government report (The Indonesian Bureau of Statistics (BPS) 2010), it holds the lowest Human Development Index in Indonesia. Among ten districts within the province, Central Lombok has the third lowest index. Rural population, which accounts for more than half of the total district population, contributes to this overall low quality of human development. Lombok itself is mostly rural, agrarian society. In the dry highland such as southern areas of Central Lombok, farmers grow corn to feed themselves and tobacco for sale to the cigarette manufacturers. In the countryside, agricultural labourers earn between IDR 6,000-12,000 for a day's work. On such wages, parents will have to make extra ordinary efforts to ensure that their children attend the school (PNPM Mandiri 2010, p.64).

Over the past five years, rigorous development programs including early childhood education and health have been directed towards rural areas, both in land and around the coasts. The said integrated early childhood development partnership targeted a far-south coastal area called Kuta, which the local government endeavors to transform into a major tourism destination. Therefore, provision of ECD program as accessible as possible is the only answer to prepare the children to be ready and competent to compete with their peers when pursuing their basic education, regardless what their background is.

### ***Theoretical Reviews***

The first years of life is known as golden age, where children significantly develop their emotional, social, regulatory, and moral capacities-critical dimension of early development that needs focused attention (Shonkoff, Philips 2000). It implies that investment in early childhood development brings

benefits of preparing children to be productive individuals, whilst failure to do so means risking children's future security and prosperity.

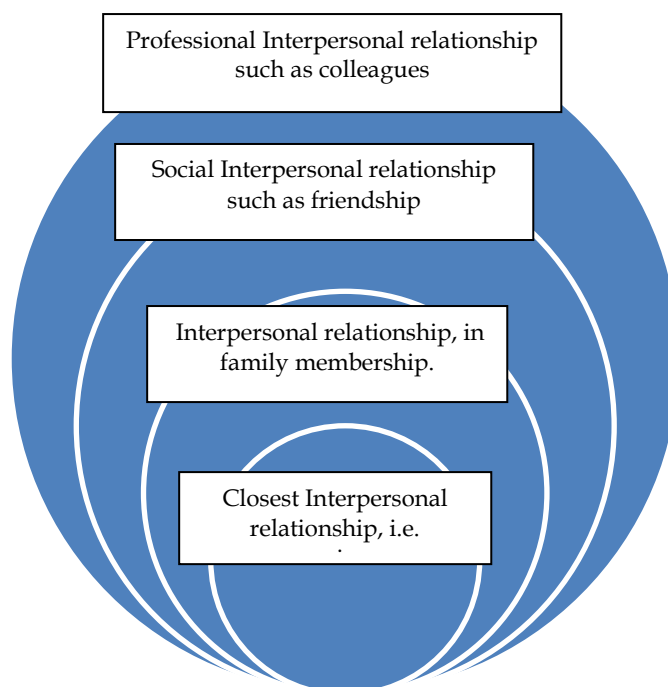
Myers (1991, p.10) furthers that children development may be connected with various programmes-including nutrition, health, and education programmes-which involve parents and other members of the community including children. This implies that intervention is needed to ensure quality education and the role of parents is as vital as teachers. Hence, in remote areas where a number of parents are not knowledgeable enough, capacity development for them is an effort to education success contribution.

Other ECD experts such as Bennett (2006), Grantham-McGregor et.al (2007), and Young and Richardson (2007) believe the necessity of ECD in its long term goals. If Bennett believes that ECD does not only cover a need of consumer based service center such as day care provision but also functions means of children to develop their cognitive and social capacities, Young and Richardson have the same idea with Grantham-McGregor et.al that ECD contributes to the investment in human resource for the economic development in one country. Grantham-McGregor et al. also stress that if the economy improves; the problem of poverty can be overcome and therefore can contribute better toward the education quality.

From the culture perspective, Ansell (2005) explains that the concept of childhood and the concepts attached to children and their development is influenced by the societal culture where children live in it. It implies that child development is culturally constructed and therefore varies among societies. Studies conducted by Sukardi (2011, p.7-11) on 40 primary school aged children in the three least developed districts in West Nusa Tenggara-where 10 of the respondents live in Central Lombok District reveals that 87% of the drop out respondents had attended their primary schooling. Causes of not going to/drop out from schools are cultural. First, from a livelihood point of view, most parents do not have steady jobs, adequate housing, or enough income. Second, high rate of parental divorce, interviewed children confess that their school concentration is insufficient knowing their parents get divorced. This affects their cognitive achievement at school contributing to failure to passing on certain subjects and getting held back to their previous class. This is worsened by some parental and communal perceptions on education that it is only for the rich as children going to school cannot help their parents earn a living. Therefore, Sukardi recommends that proper management of socialization and education campaigns be regularly conducted.

In targeted message delivery, Tillet (2000, p.145) has brought a model of effective communication management. He explains that interpersonal communication is divided into levels of degree of communicator's and receiver's closeness. Hence, the communication manager needs to map who the receivers are and determine who can address the message to them best. His role is on analyzing which channel is the best way to deliver his message. In a nutshell, this can be illustrated in a diagram as follow.

**Figure 1: Effective Communication: Degree of Communicator's closeness with the Receiver**



(Source: Extracted from Tillet: 2000)

From a management perspective, Quinn et al. (2003, p.30-31) have brought his research on models of management. Among four models, they suggest that human relation model-which consists of three elements: commitment, cohesion, morale suits a newly established organization. Quinn explains further that managers-in the organization setting has to conduct mentor role: able to communicate effectively, understanding self and others, whilst developing subordinates.

### ***ECD Programme in Central Lombok***

#### ***Historical Background***

To accelerate the achievement of healthy society-which is part of broader social welfare, Indonesian ministry of Health formulated the policy of Health Development of Village Level Society (PKMD) in 1975. This is meant to be a strategy to improve societies' health development by applying cooperative and independent works. Societies are expected to self help and detect early stages of health problems and solve them with the assigned health officials. This policy preceded the international commitment on the same concept of Primary Health Centre (PHC) included in the Alma Atta Declaration in 1978. As the works sometimes bring coordinative problems and lack of health resources, Minister of Health, The Head of National Coordinative Bureau on Family Planning and Minister of Internal Affairs have issued a joined instruction integrating the works into one means of service called Integrated Service Post (Pos Pelayanan Terpadu/Posyandu). The first massive launching of Posyandu was in the commemoration National Health Day at 1986 in Yogyakarta. Its main services delivered are accelerating growth monitoring, oral rehydration, breast feeding, immunization, female education, family planning, and food supplementation (Posyandu Indonesia 2012). Generally, Posyandu is regularly held once a month. This leaves other weeks free of functioning activities.

In 2008, the Government of Indonesia-in cooperation with UNICEF and AUSAID initiated an early child education programme labeled as Taman-which literally means garden, Posyandu. As a pilot project, it locates in the area of Kuta, Central Lombok covering 15 Posyandu units plus Gerupuk in which by administration does not belong to Kuta village but geographically closer to it. The programme is meant to expand the traditional posyandu activities by provision of learning experiences for children through play activities and parent education about child development.

In a telephone interview on 1 September 2012, the head of Taman Posyandu at Kuta, Murjayadi highlighted that addition to improving the health and nutritional status of pregnant mothers, infants, and young children as well as decreasing the incidence of malnutrition among them, the Taman Posyandu also aims at providing support to improve the children's psychosocial development and their readiness for school. It is expected to be an ideal mix of development of children's growth and development.

### *ECD Program: Good Practices*

As it has been identified that the once a month posyandu gathering can be expanded to weekly early development programme, the challenge then lies on how to engage community to make the concept operational. ECD programme in Kuta tries to bring a strategy of locality development. Supported by the district level office of Education and sub district level office of Health, participatory selection of local facilitators and pioneer TP coordinators are selected. The first step is followed up by two things-sending the local facilitators to attend the Training of Trainers in Bandung, West Java, and coordinating with coordinator on forthcoming training for TP cadres. Based on a telephone communication with the former UNICEF representative of Kuta TP on 20 September 2012, it is known that among the first facilitators to attend the training are Warniati (activist of West Nusa Tenggara Child Protection Body), Slamet (Sub district Education officer), Adis (village level health officer), and Maimunah (local early class primary class teacher). The selection process starts from recommendation from relevant stakeholder heads. It involves a fair combination of those engaging in the fields of Education, Health, and Child Protection Bodies/NGOs. Whilst the training happens, the UNICEF representative for the programme cooperates with local coordinator-Murjayadi and Syarifudin to prepare capacity development training for the cadres. Based on the training plan sent by the facilitators, the UNICEF representative assisted by a education professional outsider makes a supervision before-hand to make the plan refined before the training occurs. The refinery process (extending goals of the training into smaller objectives, bringing time allocation in line with segmented activities, and listing relevant games to play) also deals with the production of participants' worksheet to do when they finish their work in advance. Based on the anecdotal notes during January and February 2009, the refined themes of training are Programme Socialization with parents, Practical Methods in Pedagogy, Stakeholder Mapping, and Local Wisdom Based Learning. When facilitators think it is necessary, close mentorship such as peer teaching is simulated. The activity sometimes leads to an idea of teaching such as explained by Warniati as follow.

*"I got an important visualization of my forthcoming training from our peer teaching activity. The idea of making a causal diagramme medium-for instance, derives from our brainstorm after my peer teaching".*

(Unstructured interview with Warniati, 30 September, 2012)

Warniati's opinion is in line with what Adis thinks. On a personal conversation at the building rapport phase, Adis's co-facilitator wrote what he thinks about the training they would conduct.

*"Adis seemed to be a friendly and supervising co-facilitator. He stressed out a necessity for us to provide a realia such as hope tree and strategy to deal when participants get silent. I would play games, he prepared local songs to sing together".*

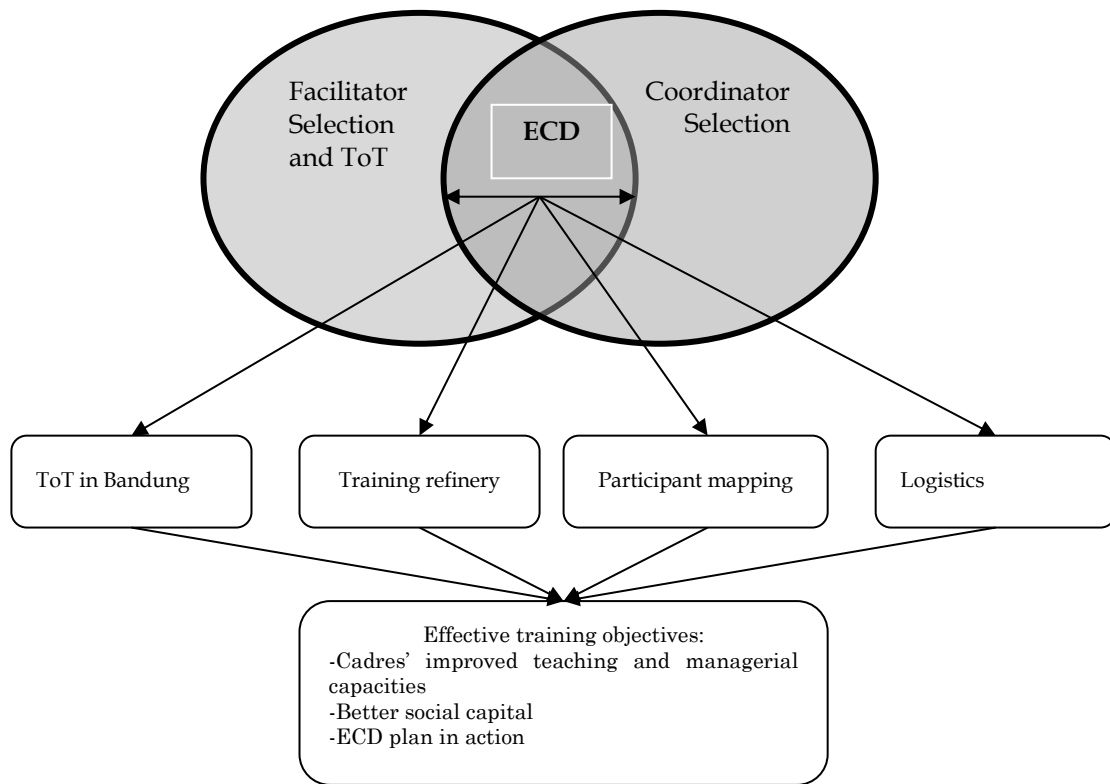
(Adis' co-facilitator's anecdotal note, 5 February 2009)

In a conversation with the previous treasurer of the programme, Hajjah Baiq Suryani on 12 September 2012, it was noted that there was small incentive scheme either for the facilitators or for the participants. She said the scheme would be lessened for the coffee break and lunch costs. Participants were helped to cover their transportation fare cost as they already left their jobs to attend the training and therefore did not have a day saving to cover it.

Hence, the first good practice to share is rigorous investment in grass root leadership through participatory selection, training refinery, and close mentoring during training. This is completed with

a small incentive scheme. The following figure illustrates how managerial steps are carried out to make sure the training goal is achieved.

**Figure 2: Kuta ECD Smooth Managerial Steps**



Teaching staffs at the TP in Kuta are called cadres. Apart from teaching, they also manage the TP. Some of them are also posyandu cadres. As they live wide apart trough out Kuta and Gerupuk, a problem rises. Having done the training sessions, the next step was putting them into practice. However, the trained cadres were wondering if they are able to travel among the TPs. It is about means of transportation. To cover the most eastern TP in Gerupuk for example, one staying in Mengalung the most western TP in Kuta, needs to travel 10 kilometres. This is not such an efficient issue. Hence the next good practice is formation of a sub-village cluster system. This is to tackle the issues related to distance and unavailability of public transport, and in turn allowed non-costly and more intensive community engagement. The agreed idea is to divide 16 targeted TPs into three clusters: One covering western coastal Kuta, another covering inland Kuta, and the rest covering eastern coastal Kuta. Each cluster-which consists of 4 up to 5 TP is coordinated by a TP coordinator. The former for instance is coordinated by TP Mengalung. All facilitators are then fairly distributed into each cluster. They get focused on advocating issues of teaching and management at their supervised TPs. Baiq Marleni- a cadre activist in TP belong to eastern cluster feels this make coordination easier. On her comment in an interview dated 12 August 2009 she said she found it easier to deal with a permanent regular facilitator as she had already known him personally and the problems, challenges, and updated progresses had already been in continuous treatment and evaluation from the same people. Syarifudin-Eastern cluster TP coordinator has shared his notes on what has been discussed and brought into action from the period of post training facilitators' advocacy. The following are excerpts recorded from advocacy anecdotal notes conducted in TP cluster III.

**Figure 3: Advocacy Anecdotal Note summary**

Themes	Activities done/discussed
Teaching Capacity Development including mini workshop, join teaching, and document discussion	indoor activities like: reading a picture book, storytelling, singing, listening to music, playing with educational materials like puzzles, games for color, shapes, number recognition and matching, arts and crafts, sorting and classification games.
	outdoor activities: ball games, circle and chasing games, pair games, traditional games involving physical activities and movement.
Managerial Development including discussion, assistance, and workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ cadre scheduling</li> <li>▪ dealing with conflicts with colleagues or house owner based TP venue</li> <li>▪ organization charting and other leadership issues motivating colleagues and managing students' display and portfolio</li> </ul>

A number of training sessions, followed up by advocacy had happened during 2008-2009. In the end of 2009, the three cluster activists gathered to establish what was called Pengurus TP (TP) board to discuss smooth exit strategy when the programme was over. The exit strategy meeting happened in Sanggar Kegiatan Belajar Lombok Tengah di Puyung (Community Learning Centre of Central Lombok District at Puyung) where it was agreed that The Lombok Tengah Education office would set aside the remaining fund of publication of Day to Day Teaching Plan as the contributing capital micro cooperative for TP board. This idea was supported by the UNICEF representative. Hence, the third good practice was facilitating the establishment of a micro cooperative that generated income for the centres' stakeholders, and provided financial support for centres' daily operation. The recorded activities so far are soft micro loans for the members used for starting production capitals, and request of loan from a staff of Education office.

Since early 2010, two years after the partnership program concluded, the centres have been owned fully by the community continue to serve the children of Kuta. Beyond that, District Health and Education Offices have worked together to replicate some components of the program to other rural areas in Central Lombok.



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