

Communication for Farmer Empowerment in Social Capital Perspective (Study on Kalianget Salt Farmer Group in Sumenep Regency)

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Abstract: Community empowerment is an alternative development paradigm aimed at enhancing capacity and independence. However, this process cannot be fully achieved without participatory communication, since communicative actions within the community directly influence participation levels, allowing development to adapt to local characteristics. Therefore, this study integrates the empowerment communication paradigm with the perspective of social capital, which emphasizes togetherness and cooperation in addressing collective challenges. The research focuses on coastal communities in Kalianget Subdistrict to explore the role of social capital in the communication practices of salt farmer groups and to design an empowerment model grounded in social capital. This study employed a qualitative method with a case study approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with community leaders, salt farmer group leaders, and members, complemented by participatory observation and documentation studies. Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification, while data validity was strengthened through source and method triangulation. The findings reveal that three dimensions of social capital—social networks, trust, and values and norms—serve as the main pillars in the communication practices of salt farmer groups. Social networks were established through interactions based on mutual benefits, trust was reinforced through solidarity and reciprocity, and values and norms functioned as collective guidelines for both social and economic behavior. These findings affirm that communication rooted in social capital plays a significant role in strengthening community empowerment processes. Theoretically, this study enriches the discourse on empowerment communication, while practically it provides references for policymakers and communities in designing more adaptive empowerment strategies.

Keywords: Empowerment Communication; Social Capital; Salt Farmers.

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Introduction

Sumenep Regency is one of the regencies on Madura Island, which has a coastal area of 577.76 km. The coastal area in Sumenep Regency is divided into two parts: the inland coastal area and the coastal area of the archipelago. The coastal archipelago in Sumenep regency consists of 126 islands, with details of 48 inhabited islands and 78 uninhabited islands. Inland coastal regions are divided into two groups, namely (1) fishing coastal community groups and (2) salt farmer groups. As a coastal area, Sumenep Regency can make a positive contribution as a marine product catchment and salt-producing area at the national level. Based on BPS data, the Sumenep district can produce 532 tons of marine fish per year, and each year, it can produce 286.42 tons of salt from the Kalianget district to meet the national salt supply (BPS, 2018).

Behind the positive contributions mentioned above, Sumenep Regency as a coastal area still experiences many community welfare problems, one of which is the Poverty Depth Index (P1) and Poverty Severity Index (P2) of Sumenep Regency which increased between March 2020 - March 2021, in that period it was recorded that March P1, 2021 of 4.73 increased by 0.4 points compared to March 2020. Meanwhile, P2 March 2021 of 1.56 increased by 0.26 points compared to March 2020. In the last year, the number of poor people has increased by 4.5 thousand (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Sumenep, 2020).

The above presentation shows that despite abundant natural resources such as marine catches and national-level sea salt suppliers, coastal communities such as salt farmer groups have yet to become prosperous. In this case, the government has tried to improve the welfare of coastal communities, especially salt farmer groups, in a planned, structured, and sustainable manner, including the "national salt self-sufficiency" program in 2010, 2011 implemented the program through the People's Salt Business Empowerment (PUGAR) based on Ministerial Regulation Number PER.41 / MEN / 2011 concerning Guidelines for the Implementation of the National Program for Marine and Fisheries Independent Community Empowerment. The local government runs the program through the Fisheries Service (for the district level, previously the Fisheries and Marine Service). It is also mentioned in Ministerial Regulation Number PER.41 / MEN / 2011 that PUGAR is one component of the National Program for the Empowerment of Independent Marine and Fisheries Communities (PNPM Mandiri KP), which aims to alleviate poverty through increasing community capacity and income as well as growing marine and fisheries businesses through training and mentoring activities from the Fisheries Office related to alternative salt-making technologies such as the use of geomembrane carpets (Hanik & Mutmainah, 2020).

The government program above has yet to have a significant impact. It can be measured from the salt processing system as the main commodity of salt farmers in the Sumenep district. Salt farmers, especially in the Kalianget sub-district, still use traditional technology from production to distribution (Hanik & Mutmainah, 2020).

Indeed, empowerment activities do not only lie in government assistance programs that routinely go down every year. Community empowerment is an alternative paradigm of development to bring people to empowerment and independence. Empowerment aims to build a conscious and planned community to prepare itself to make changes to improve the quality of life. In this study, good development is community-based development based on the needs of salt farmer groups in the Kalianget sub-district itself towards the expected quality of life improvement conditions (Setyowati, 2019).

The empowerment process will only achieve its goals if a participatory communication process supports it. Community communicative actions affect community participation to help maximize development according to the characteristics of the community itself. This research departs from the empowerment communication paradigm to create sustainable, inclusive development for salt farmer groups in the Kalianget sub-district and uses the social capital paradigm. The concept of social capital arises from the thought that members of society may be unable to overcome the various problems faced individually. There is a need for togetherness and cooperation from all interested community members to overcome this (Nuridayati & Hasan, 2021).

Therefore, this research used a communication paradigm to capture the perspective of local wisdom of coastal communities in the Kalianget sub-district, the results of which can be

developed as an empowerment design based on the social capital of coastal communities. This social capital-based empowerment design is expected to be a reference for sustainable, inclusive development for coastal communities and salt farmer groups in the Kalianget sub-district so that they can get out of stigma and helpless conditions.

This study examined coastal communities' communication activities from the perspective of social capital. From the standpoint of social capital, three main dimensions will be the basis: network, cooperation, and norms. Based on the three dimensions of social capital above, this study wants to know how communication elements can strengthen the social capital of coastal communities so that the results of this study can provide an overview or design of coastal community empowerment, specifically salt farmer groups in Sumenep district.

The perspective of social capital is used because many research results show that social capital in the community has a vital role in improving the community's quality of life. Social capital is concerned with utilizing social relations, where social ties include social networks, beliefs, and values or norms to obtain various benefits, including economic and other social benefits (Fathy, 2019).

The concept of social capital lies in the ability of the community to build a network and cooperate with other individuals or community groups to achieve common goals. The cooperation referred to in the social capital perspective is related to the pattern of mutual interaction and mutual benefit built on the principle of trust supported by positive social values (Laura et al., 2018).

Based on the explanation above, it means that social capital can be implemented in community empowerment activities, where it is characterized by efforts to improve access to information, helpful in mobilizing support, tools to instill and spread trust, and create relationships of mutual respect through a clear identity in the community (Rahmatullah, 2023).

The communication aspect is one of the important factors in realizing the dimension of social capital, as explained by the concept of social capital, which lies in the ability of the community to build a network and cooperate with other individuals or community groups to achieve common goals. The cooperation referred to in the perspective of social capital is related to the pattern of mutual interaction and mutual benefit built on the principle of trust (Laura et al., 2018).

The concept of interaction that lies in the perspective of social capital is in line with the concept of communication. The meaning of communication itself lies in the interaction between one or more people, as the understanding of communication activities is the interaction or process of exchanging information between humans in general. It shows that the concept of social capital will be optimally developed if salt farmers in the Kalianget sub-district can realize interpersonal communication well in the interaction relationship between individuals and coastal community groups. Based on this perspective, this study wants to examine the elements of communication in three dimensions of social capital of coastal communities so that the results of this study can provide an overview or design of coastal community empowerment, especially for salt farmer groups, especially in Sumenep district.

The research method was qualitative descriptive. Descriptive qualitative is a research method for exploring and understanding *meanings* that several individuals or groups have described to social or humanitarian problems. The qualitative research process that will be used through efforts includes asking questions and procedures, collecting specific data from participants, analyzing data, and interpreting the meaning of the data. The research location was

in Karanganyar village and the Pinggir Papas Kalianget sub-district. The research location was chosen because, geographically, the area is a coastal area and salt producer (salt pond).

Data collection techniques in this study used interviews, observation, and documentation. Primary data was obtained based on interviews and observations through *purposive sampling techniques*. Secondary data from supporting documents, such as previous research, resulted from various research articles.

Informants in this study included salt farmers (members in the salt farmer group) as the Key Informant, the head of the salt farmer group as the main Informant, and the supporting informant as the village heads of two local villages. After collecting data using interview and observation techniques, researchers proceed to analyze the data in stages;

1. Read the entire data. At this stage, build a *general sense* of the information obtained and reflect on its meaning.
2. Analyze data by *coding* data. Coding is the process of processing material or information into segments of writing before interpreting it.
3. Apply the coding process to describe the people, categories, and themes to be analyzed.
4. Describe these themes and then represent them in a narrative or qualitative report.

Data validity uses data triangulation or source triangulation. Through this technique, you can utilize different types of data sources to explore similar data. It's like doing the same interview with other informants (Jhon W Creswell, 2017).

Theoretical Study

Farmer empowerment is understood as a development approach that emphasizes strengthening capacity, access, and independence of communities in managing their resources. This concept does not only highlight economic aspects but also involves psychological, social, and political dimensions, enabling farmers to become empowered both individually and collectively (Piccoli et al., 2023). Empowerment is conceived as a process that enhances agency, expands access to resources, and produces achievements relevant to local needs. In the context of salt farmers, empowerment cannot be separated from community strength, networks, and social solidarity that enable them to overcome collective problems (Wismanu et al., 2023). This aligns with the perspective that empowerment is endogenous and must rely on local strengths, rather than merely external aid transfers (Mulder, 2023).

Within the communication framework, empowerment is considered effective through a participatory communication approach that rejects the one-way transfer of information paradigm. Instead, empowerment communication emphasizes equal dialogue, active participation, and continuous social learning (Khasenov, 2025). This principle is rooted in Paulo Freire's notion of dialogical and problem-posing communication, where communities are not positioned as objects but as subjects involved in defining problems and solutions. Participatory communication in rural development requires horizontal relationships among community members, reciprocal knowledge exchange, and a collective behavioral change orientation (Yudarwati & Gregory, 2022). Through participatory communication practices, farmers are able to strengthen technical capacity, improve production coordination, and create collective actions oriented toward sustainability (Firmanto et al., 2023).

The concept of social capital then provides a theoretical framework that explains how social interaction functions as a resource for development. Social capital is understood as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation among individuals in society (Hidalgo et al., 2024). Three key dimensions of social capital include structural aspects

related to patterns of networks and connections, relational aspects related to trust and reciprocity, and cognitive aspects in the form of norms, values, and shared language used to build collective visions. In addition, social capital can be seen in the form of bonding that strengthens group cohesion, bridging that connects across groups, and linking that provides access to institutions and markets. The function of social capital in economic and collective contexts is crucial because it can reduce transaction costs, accelerate information flows, and facilitate collective action to achieve common goals (Rosca et al., 2022).

The relationship between communication and social capital in the empowerment process is mutually reinforcing. Participatory communication builds and activates social capital through transparent and dialogical interactions, while strong social capital strengthens communication effectiveness by providing trust networks, values, and norms that support cooperation (Rispoli & Vannucci, 2025). Through this mechanism, communication becomes a medium for information exchange and social learning, while social capital provides a foundation of trust and solidarity that strengthens collective action. Thus, communication and social capital together encourage the realization of farmer empowerment, both in technical, economic, and socio-political aspects.

Salt farmer groups in coastal areas, including those in Kalianget District, serve as an important arena where communication and social capital operate synergistically. These groups act as a mediation space between local knowledge, technical innovation, and market access. Communicative leadership from group leaders and community figures plays a crucial role in bridging information related to policies, prices, and technology (Shu & Wang, 2021). Through group forums, extension activities, and co-production of knowledge take place, allowing farmers to learn together, discuss problems, and formulate strategies. Regular meetings, field practices, and informal communication forums strengthen social networks, foster trust, and form collective norms that serve as behavioral guidelines in salt production and marketing.

Furthermore, coastal communities hold local wisdom closely tied to traditional ecological knowledge. This knowledge functions as a guide in determining production calendars, managing salt ponds, and anticipating weather and climate variability (Hossain et al., 2021). The integration of local wisdom with modern scientific knowledge through participatory communication enhances the legitimacy of innovations, minimizes resistance, and ensures socio-ecological sustainability. Thus, the empowerment of salt farmers cannot be separated from the cultural and ecological context that shapes their patterns of social interaction.

Conceptually, the process of salt farmer empowerment can be seen as a cycle. Inputs in the form of participatory communication, institutional support, and market and ecological conditions are processed through the activation of social capital manifested in networks, trust, and collective norms. This process generates intermediate outcomes such as enhanced technical capacity, production coordination, access to markets and services, and strengthened social solidarity. Ultimately, these lead to broader outcomes in farmer empowerment, encompassing psychological, economic, socio-political, and livelihood sustainability dimensions (Becerra-Encinales et al., 2024). These findings indicate that effective communication and strong social capital are prerequisites for achieving sustainable coastal community empowerment.

Method

This study employed a qualitative method with a case study approach. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the communication dynamics in the empowerment of salt farmers in Kalianget District, Sumenep, by emphasizing the surrounding social, cultural, and local wisdom contexts. The case study was considered

appropriate since the focus of the research was directed at a specific salt farmer group as the unit of analysis, representing empowerment communication practices within the framework of social capital.

The research location was determined purposively, namely in Kalianget District, Sumenep Regency, which is widely known as one of the centers of traditional salt production in Madura. This location was selected because it reflects the characteristics of a coastal community with a strong tradition in salt production, while at the same time facing structural challenges in terms of marketing and resource management.

The research subjects consisted of various actors involved in the activities of the salt farmer group. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their active involvement and deep knowledge of group activities. They included local community leaders, the head of the salt farmer group, group members, and representatives of relevant local institutions. To strengthen data variation, the snowball sampling technique was also applied, enabling the researcher to identify additional informants through recommendations from the initial participants.

Data were collected using three primary techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document study. In-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner to explore the experiences, perspectives, and interpretations of informants regarding communication practices within the group. Participant observation was carried out by directly engaging in several group activities, such as regular meetings, group discussions, and salt production activities, to better understand the social interactions that naturally occurred. Document study was utilized to complement field data through the examination of archives, meeting minutes, organizational records, and secondary data from official reports and relevant publications.

The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model of analysis, which includes three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction was carried out through the processes of selection, focusing, and simplification of information obtained from interviews, observations, and documents. Data display was organized in the form of matrices, tables, and narrative descriptions to facilitate the researcher's comprehension of patterns and relationships among variables. Finally, conclusions were drawn by holistically reviewing the findings and conducting verification to ensure that the results remained consistent and reliable.

The validity of the data was ensured through triangulation techniques, which included source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and time triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from various informants; methodological triangulation was achieved by comparing data from interviews, observations, and documents; while time triangulation was performed by collecting data at different times to minimize situational bias. In addition, member checks were carried out by asking informants to confirm the accuracy of the interview interpretations to ensure the credibility of the findings.

Through this qualitative case study design, the research provides an in-depth and comprehensive depiction of how participatory communication and social capital play significant roles in the empowerment process of salt farmer groups in Kalianget District, Sumenep.

Results and Discussion

1. Results

a. Communication of Empowerment

Communication is one of the resources that can produce a change in people's lives. This change intersects with the purpose of empowerment; empowerment, in this case, is the ability of the community to strive to improve the dignity and dignity of layers of society in conditions unable to escape the trap of poverty and backwardness (Aprilia Theresia, Krisnha S Andini, Prima Nugraha, 2015).

Changes that occur in society explain that social change in culture is produced by the process of community dialogue/communication and collective action that is interdependent. Community dialogue stimulates collective action. Each individual in the group will take action to overcome the various problems faced; this is the root of social change that aims to improve collective welfare as well as the goal of empowerment.

Based on the statement above, this study tried to examine the communication activities of coastal communities from the perspective of social capital, where in the perspective of social capital, three main dimensions will be the basis, including Network Dimensions, Cooperation, and Norms. Based on the three dimensions of social capital above, this study wants to know how communication elements can strengthen the social capital of coastal communities so that the results of this study can provide an overview or design of coastal community empowerment, specifically salt farmer groups in Sumenep district.

This research focuses more on approaches from the empowerment communication perspective for developing salt farmer groups' social capital design. The social capital in question has three important elements, including (1) Network or bond, (2) Trust, and (3) Values and Norms. The explanation of the three aspects of social capital include (1) **Social Networks**, patterns of interaction exchange based on the principle of benefit or benefit; (2) **Community Trust**, communities or groups unite and contribute to each other; (3) **Values and Norms**: general standards of individual behavior and attitudes related to community life in socializing,

The concept of social capital arises from the thought that members of society cannot cope with various problems encountered individually. There is a need for togetherness and cooperation from all interested community members to overcome this (Nuridayati & Hasan, 2021).

As for the results of interviews with informants, it can be seen that in everyday life, people in Karanganyar village can develop empowerment skills independently through social capital activities in their environment based on values and norms, social ties, and mutual trust between community members can make them

b. Communication of Empowerment

According to Anthony Bebington, community empowerment is an effort to improve the dignity of layers of society who are unable to escape the trap of poverty and backwardness. In other words, empowerment is enabling and self-reliant society. Empowerment means improving the quality of life or welfare of each individual and community, both in the sense of (Aprilia Theresia, Krisnha S Andini, Prima Nugraha, 2015): 1) economic improvement, especially food sufficiency, 2) improvement of social welfare (education and health), 3) freedom from all forms of oppression, 4) guaranteed safety, and 5) guarantee of human rights free from fear and worry. The analysis of this study shows that, from the problems of deep coastal communities, especially in karanganyar village, kalianget district, they can use a social capital theory approach: 1) Values

and Norms, 2) Social Networks and Ties, and 3) Local Community Trust Local community empowerment activities are able and independent in improving the quality of life or welfare of each individual and community in Karanganyar village.

The determination of communication strategies to be used in this research uses Harold D. Lasswell's theory by first answering the following questions: *Who Says What In Which Channel To Whom With What Effect*. This theory explains the elements of communication including: Communicators, communicants, media, messages, and effects (impact), (Wijaya, 2015). These communication elements will be described based on interviews with research informants, namely representatives of Karanganyar village.

These communication elements can form the basis for the concept of developing coastal community empowerment with a social capital approach, along with the results of analysis of informant information;

- a) Communicator Element: The communicators considered ideal and effective in conveying messages related to values and norms, social networks/ties, and community beliefs are religious leaders and media personnel such as local doctors and midwives. The main order of choice of informants as communicators is religious figures or local Kyai or Ustad. As for other answers from informants in Karanganyar village, they felt more trusting and motivated when involving religious leaders close to the local community and related compliance with maintaining values and norms. Please help and trust in society with hadith or verses in Islam.
- b) Communicant Element: Coastal communities already know or get information about how to apply values and norms, social networks/ties, and social beliefs. It relates to the local community's educational, social, and economic background. This communicant element communicates more to the closest communicants, such as family (children), relatives, and neighbors.
- c) Message Elements: The message conveyed relates to how to apply values and norms and work together to build networks or social bonds through joint activities.
- d) Media Elements: Local wisdom, such as gathering or "hanging out" at relatives' homes or security posts among neighbors or relatives, becomes an effective communication medium to increase local community participation in daily activities to generate mutual sympathy and empathy when one of them experiences difficulties So that the three pillars of social capital can be applied.
- e) Effect Elements: The impact obtained through three aspects of social capital allows people to get out of everyday problems, such as financial problems, security, and building togetherness. In other words, applying values and norms, establishing networks / social ties, and building social trust become activities to empower local communities to independently improve the quality of life or welfare of every individual and community in Karanganyar village.

2. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that empowerment communication plays a central role in strengthening the social capital of salt farmer groups in Karanganyar Village, Kalianget District, Sumenep Regency. The communication that takes place is not merely an exchange of information, but also serves as a means to build social networks, reinforce trust, and affirm the values and norms prevailing within the community. This is in line with the view of Aprilia Theresia, (Achmad, 2024), who assert that empowerment is a process aimed at enhancing the dignity and worth of the poor through efforts to foster independence and improve quality of life.

These findings demonstrate that communication, from the perspective of social capital, is a strategic instrument that drives social change in both economic and socio-cultural dimensions.

In practice, the dimension of social networks is reflected in the community's habit of helping one another in the salt production process, as well as in their participation in group meetings that discuss marketing and distribution strategies. The dimension of trust is evident in members' mutual belief that cooperation will yield collective benefits, while the dimension of values and norms is reflected in adherence to local regulations and religious teachings that guide everyday life. These findings support the study by (Achmad, 2022), which emphasized the importance of togetherness and social solidarity in strengthening community empowerment capacity. However, this study contributes novelty by showing that social-capital-based communication among salt farmer communities in Sumenep not only builds internal solidarity but also expands networks with external actors such as religious leaders, health workers, and local institutions.

Furthermore, from the perspective of Harold D. Lasswell's communication theory, the findings show that the elements of communication play a significant role in building empowerment. The communicator element—represented by religious and community leaders—proved to be the most trusted actors in delivering messages related to values, norms, and social ethics. This finding reinforces (Al-Sharafi, 2022) assertion that communication effectiveness heavily depends on the credibility of the communicator in the local context. The communicants, namely the coastal community, demonstrated openness in receiving messages, particularly through family relationships and kinship networks. The messages conveyed were largely related to reinforcing values of togetherness, cooperation, and social solidarity, which were further strengthened through local communication media such as informal gatherings in residents' homes or neighborhood watch posts.

In terms of effects, this study reveals that social-capital-based communication is capable of generating tangible changes in community life, including increased trust, solidarity in facing economic challenges, and collective capacity in maintaining social welfare and security. This is consistent with (Kullu, 2023) findings, which argue that community-based empowerment enables people to overcome structural limitations by optimizing available social resources. However, this study adds new insights by highlighting that in the context of salt farmers, social-capital-based communication not only affects economic aspects but also reinforces local wisdom and cultural identity within coastal communities.

The implications of this study are evident on both practical and academic levels. On a practical level, the research provides a concrete picture of how participatory, social-capital-based communication can serve as a strategy to empower salt farmer groups in Sumenep, particularly in addressing structural poverty and market uncertainty. On an academic level, the study enriches empowerment communication scholarship by offering new perspectives on the role of religious leaders and local communication media in strengthening the social capital of coastal communities.

As for future research, it is necessary to further examine the role of digital technology and social media in expanding social networks and strengthening empowerment communication among salt farmer communities. In addition, comparative studies across coastal regions would be valuable to explore how local contexts shape the dynamics of social-capital-based empowerment communication. Such studies may lead to the development of more adaptive and contextually relevant empowerment models tailored to the needs of local communities.

Conclusion

The conclusions in this study showed three main dimensions of social capital: values and norms, social networks or ties, and community trust used by salt farmer groups in Kalianget, Sumenep regency in surviving and improving the quality of life of the local community. The following were as follows: (1) Values and norms: Involvement in community activities indirectly teaches and lowers the values and norms of the Karanganyar village community to the younger generation and to migrant residents. Values and norms that are firmly held by the community in Karanganyar Village in Kalianget sub-district in social life through openness, engaging in community / participatory activities, and maintaining manners (meaning: being able to interact with fellow citizens by first prioritizing civility), (2) Network or Social Ties; Local wisdom such as gathering or "hanging out" at relatives' homes or security posts among neighbors or relatives becomes an effective communication medium to increase local community participation in daily activities, so as to generate mutual sympathy and empathy when one of them experiences difficulties, (3) Community Trust; There is a sense of common destiny, economic background, work, and social status that are not different far makes the people of Karanganyar village and the edge of papas have a good mutual trust between residents both in terms of work, community affairs to ask for help from neighbors or colleagues even to financial matters (debt). This sense of trust indirectly builds strength in the community, raising the ability to be empowered in overcoming daily problems.

The results of this study are expected to provide an alternative approach to empowering the Kalianget salt farmer group in Sumenep district, that empowerment is not always related to economic capital alone, such as capital procurement in the form of compensation or tool assistance. The perspective of social capital has an equally important role as other capital in improving people's welfare. Supported by an effective communication process, establishing relationships based on equality of values and trust becomes an alternative to bring out empowered abilities in their environment.

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