



The Role of Women's Political Leadership (Case Study: Senggreng Village, Malang Regency)

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Abstrak

A Terakomodasinya kepentingan atau kebutuhan kelompok perempuan menjadi proses penting dalam proses pembangunan, terutama di tingkat desa. Pasalnya bukan saja menghasilkan kebijakan yang mampu memenuhi kebutuhan perempuan, tetapi juga mampu mengakomodir kepentingan kelompok lainnya yang selama ini tidak menjadi perhatian. Saat ini jabatan kepala desa di Kabupaten Malang masih didominasi oleh laki-laki. Secara tidak langsung, ini menunjukkan bahwa kebijakan pembangunan yang dihasilkan belum mengakomodir kelompok perempuan di desa-desa yang ada di Kabupaten Malang. Namun, Desa Senggreng yang saat ini memiliki kepala desa perempuan berhasil dalam mengakomodir kebutuhan kelompok perempuan terutama dalam Bidang Pembangunan Desa dan Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Desa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Kepala Desa Senggreng menggunakan pendekatan inovatif, responsif, dan partisipatif dalam membuat kebijakan dan program pembangunan di Desa Senggreng.

Kata kunci: Pemimpinan Perempuan, Kebijakan Pembangunan, Partisipasi

Abstract

Addressing the interests and needs of women is a fundamental aspect of the development process, especially within village contexts. This is not only important for producing policies that meet women's needs but also for accommodating the interests of other marginalized groups that have historically been overlooked. Currently, village head positions in Malang Regency remain predominantly held by men. Indirectly, this indicates that the resulting development policies have not yet adequately addressed the needs of women in villages across Malang Regency. However, Senggreng Village, under the leadership of a female village head, has successfully accommodated the needs of women, particularly in the areas of Village Development and Community Empowerment. The findings of this study revealed that the Village Head of Senggreng implements innovative, responsive, and participatory approaches in formulating developmental policies and programs.

Keywords: Development Policy, Participation, Women's Leadership.

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Introduction

The presence of women in public positions, such as village headships, is expected to act as a catalyst for social transformation. Nevertheless, in practice, negative perceptions regarding women's leadership continue to persist. According to Maria (as cited in Famelasari and Prastiwi, 2021), patriarchal culture has become the root of widespread male domination in the political arena, including in regulatory formulation processes that marginalize women's interests. Wirasandi et. al (2022) identified this as a barrier that women leaders frequently encounter in performing their roles.

Women's leadership not only produces policies that respond to women's needs but also accommodates the interests of other groups that have long been neglected. Research conducted by Prastiwi & Yunas (2022) demonstrated that under the leadership of a female village head in Fatub'a Village, Belu Regency, policy initiatives emerged that facilitated improvements in women's quality of life, such as reforms in customary marriage fines (*belis*) and other traditional regulations. This aligns with Nova (2022), who stated that women's presence in leadership positions has a positive influence on development processes and policymaking across various sectors, including education, health, environmental affairs, governance, and social welfare.

At present, Malang Regency has 378 village heads, consisting of 349 men and only 29 women. These figures illustrate that village leadership positions in Malang Regency remain male-dominated. Consequently, development policies may not yet adequately represent the needs of women in rural communities. However, among the 29 female village heads, one located in Senggreng Village has successfully developed policies and programs that accommodate the needs of women, particularly in the areas of Village Development and Community Empowerment.

Research conducted by Nuryati (2015) explains that studies on leadership through a gender perspective tend to equate men and women or disregard the differences between them. Several other studies indicate that women's leadership styles are generally more democratic, whereas men are considered more suited to a direct or command-oriented leadership style. Consequently, Basuki (2012) asserted that within leadership studies, men are often perceived as having a higher status than women.

The urgency of this research is grounded in the gender perspective within leadership research, aiming to examine the role of women's leadership, particularly that of the female

village head in Senggreng Village, Malang Regency, in accommodating women's needs through existing policies or programs implemented in the village. This research seeks to depart from the previous studies mentioned above. It does not aim to analyze women's leadership style, but instead focuses on exploring the active role of the female Village Head of Senggreng in accommodating the needs of women's groups in her village.

Through this approach, the research aims to illustrate and analyze the process through which the female village head accommodates women's needs via village policies and programs. This research employs a qualitative method with a focus on the process of accommodating women's needs within policymaking. Data were collected from several purposively selected informants, namely: (1) the Village Head of Senggreng; (2) the Village Secretary of Senggreng; and (3) several village residents. All informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique.

Methodology

This research employed a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach. Qualitative research is a descriptive method in which most problem-solving procedures are carried out by describing current conditions involving individuals, institutions, communities, or other subjects based on reliable and verifiable facts (Soekanto, 2006). The focus of this research lay in the process of accommodating women's group needs within the policies or development programs formulated by the Government of Senggreng Village, Sumberpucung District, Malang Regency.

The research object is women's leadership within the governance of Senggreng Village in accommodating the needs of women's groups. The research was conducted in Senggreng Village, Sumberpucung District, Malang Regency, East Java Province. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, meaning that informants were intentionally chosen based on specific criteria and considerations. Accordingly, the informants in this research were: (1) the Village Head of Senggreng; (2) the Village Secretary of Senggreng; and (3) several residents of Senggreng Village, particularly women involved in the village development policy making process.

Result and Discussion

Result

Leadership

In general, leadership can be defined as a process through which an individual directs, guides, and/or controls the thoughts, emotions, or behaviors of others (Ilaihi in Rakhmawati, 2016). Effective leadership is partly determined by emotional understanding and abilities associated with emotional intelligence (Lee et al., 2023). Emotional intelligence may involve the capacity of a leader to quickly minimize stress, the ability to recognize and regulate oneself and one's emotions, the ability to communicate with others, the ability to utilize humor in conflict resolution, and the ability to act confidently and proactively in addressing conflict. Based on these competencies, Zada et al., (2023) argued that leaders who possess adequate skills and knowledge are better equipped to conduct effective project management, enabling organizational goals to be achieved efficiently and effectively.

Meanwhile, according to Lambert (2005) leadership constitutes a shared and reciprocal learning process that is purposefully directed within a community. Reciprocal learning is essential for problem-solving and collaborative work. Purpose involves values, focus, and the creation of momentum, while learning involves the co-construction of meaning and knowledge. Community serves as a crucial environment for acquiring reciprocal learning experiences and achieving collective goals.

Theoretically, leadership has been identified by scholars through several perspectives, including: (1) leadership as a process, (2) leadership as influence, (3) leadership occurring within a group, and (4) leadership involving shared goals. Referring to these four perspectives, leadership is understood as a process in which an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve shared objectives. Defining leadership as a process implies that leadership is not merely a trait or inherent characteristic possessed by a leader, but rather a transactional event occurring between leaders and followers. This process demonstrates that leaders can influence, and also be influenced by, their followers. Leadership is viewed as an interactive phenomenon involving communication to achieve established goals (Rachmanantya, 2020).

Development Policy

In theoretical discourse, numerous scholars have examined and defined the concept of development policy. For instance, regarding the term policy, many scholars have offered definitions and analytical perspectives. Anderson (2011), for example, investigates policy from the standpoint of actor behavior. He argued that policy itself is formed by the behavior of one or more actors-government officials, agencies, or legislative bodies-within activities intended to protect society (Anderson, 2011).

Similarly Elau and Prewitt (as cited in Wahab, 2012) viewed policy as a decision characterized by consistent and repetitive behavior, which encourages compliance among individuals and groups involved. Meanwhile, Dye (as cited in Winarno, 2014) provides a simpler definition, stating that policy is whatever governments choose to do or not to do. However, Rose (as cited in Winarno, 2014) offered a slightly different perspective by viewing policy as a series of activities that are more or less interconnected and have consequences for those concerned, rather than as a single decision. According to Winarno (2014), this definition tends to be ambiguous, as policy is ultimately understood as a direction or pattern of activities rather than merely a decision to act.

Nevertheless, one principle remains clear: Mustopadidjaja (as cited in Tahir, 2014) emphasized that the term policy is commonly used in relation to government activities. This aligns with Easton (as cited in Tahir, 2014), who stated that policy represents the authoritative allocation of values for society. It reflects what the government chooses to carry out or not to carry out. Therefore, within this context, policy should be viewed as a continuous and cyclical process.

Similar to policy, the concept of development has also been widely examined by scholars, resulting in numerous definitions. In the social sciences, development is generally classified into two major paradigms: modernization and dependency (Tikson, 2005). The modernization paradigm includes macro theories of economic growth and social change, as well as micro theories concerning individual values that support the change process. Meanwhile, the dependency paradigm includes theories of underdevelopment, dependency, and the world-system (Tikson, 2005).

Based on Husodo (2020), the concept of development can be linked to various approaches, including spatial or geographical approaches and economic approaches. However, the economic policy approach is generally the most widely used because its indicators of



success are easier to measure. Nonetheless, there are several perspectives that can be used to define development, such as classical sociological perspectives presented by Durkheim, Weber, Marx, and Rostow, which enrich introductory discussions of development from a social perspective up to sustainable development (Nugroho & Rochmin, 2004).

Meanwhile, according to Sanusi (2004), the development process must contain at least three fundamental components. First, it relates to livelihood. In this regard, every individual has basic needs that must be fulfilled, including protection. Second, it relates to human dignity, in which a good life reflects respect for oneself and for others. Third, it concerns the objectives of development. In simple terms, every development effort must have clear goals and should not benefit only one party.

Discussion

The Role of the Senggreng Village Head in Accommodating the Interests of Women's Groups

Women's leadership in Senggreng Village has demonstrated a significant contribution to formulating policies that are responsive to women's needs. This is reflected in the innovative spirit of her leadership, which focuses on accelerating development and improving public services, particularly in addressing and fulfilling the needs of women in the village. These initiatives indicate that her leadership promotes an inclusive and participatory approach.

The presence of women in public positions, such as village headships, is expected to catalyze societal change. Moreover, the enactment of Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 6 of 2014 concerning Villages has driven village governance toward more progressive transformation. In the Senggreng Village Revenue and Expenditure Budget (APBD) of 2023, the sectors of Village Development and Community Empowerment represent the second-largest portion of budget allocations after Village Government Administration. The total budget for these two sectors amounts to IDR 477,760,600.

Furthermore, as expressed by the village head during the preliminary research stage, a majority of residents feel that there is no gap between men and women in the village. Rendyta Witrayani, the Village Head of Senggreng, stated that since her inauguration, her primary focus has been on improving the quality of life for women. One of her first decisions was to appoint a woman to the position of Head of Planning. This was intended to ensure that the village

development planning process prioritizes women's needs and interests, thereby preventing gender disparities in the village (Witrayani, 2024).

Efforts to accommodate the needs of women in Senggreng Village were not limited to the appointment of a woman as the Head of Planning. The Village Head also adopted an inclusive approach, demonstrated through programs that bring public services directly to the community. One such initiative is the Pelayanan Cepat Tanpa Meninggalkan Kerjoan (Pecel Tempe Mendoan) program, which is a responsive measure aimed at facilitating easier access to administrative services.

From a gender perspective, this program reduces the burden on women, who are generally still heavily involved in domestic responsibilities and therefore often find it difficult to leave their homes to manage administrative matters. Moreover, this initiative provides equal access to public services for both men and women in Senggreng Village. The use of an inclusive approach is essential because village governments must not restrict service access for their residents.

This reflects the broad authority available to village governments, whereby control of governance can also lie in the hands of the community. A leader must be capable of transforming, influencing, and directing others with a strong vision and mission. Therefore, leadership cannot be separated from the group, but should also be viewed as a position with high potential in its field.

In addition to the Pecel Tempe Mendoan program, Senggreng Village, under female leadership, also achieved national recognition as the Best Quality Family Village (Kampung Keluarga Berkualitas Terbaik) in 2024. This accomplishment illustrates the success of family welfare-oriented policy development. From a gender standpoint, it demonstrates that the programs implemented by the Senggreng Village Government support women's empowerment within the family to enhance their quality of life. Furthermore, women in the village who previously operated primarily in the domestic sphere now have greater opportunities to engage in sustainable family development.

Participation of Women's Groups in Senggreng Village

The programs implemented by the Senggreng Village Government demonstrate how women's needs are accommodated at the village level. This indicates that the leadership of the Senggreng Village Head is grounded in a participatory approach. The village government

actively involves the community in the planning and implementation processes of these programs, including receiving and incorporating aspirations from women's groups within Senggreng Village.

In the context of gender, programs designed to accommodate women's needs and aimed at addressing women's issues adopt the principle of inclusion by incorporating women's voices in village decision-making processes. As a result, policies and programs produced are intended to be responsive to women's needs, such as reproductive health services and vocational skills training.

Furthermore, within the Village Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMDes), the Head of Senggreng Village prioritizes the acceleration of development and the enhancement of equitable public services. The primary focus is on the construction of gender-responsive infrastructure, including public facilities that consider women's needs, and on supporting women's participation in the local economy through training and facilitation for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

Therefore, women's participation in the policy-making process for village development becomes crucial, as it can generate policies capable of addressing women's needs. According to Nova (2022), the presence of women brings a significant positive effect in both the development process and policy formulation across various sectors such as education, health, environmental management, governance, and social affairs. Nova (2022) further illustrated the importance of women's participation in policy through her research in Blang Krueng Village, where women's involvement became a key factor in the village's success in receiving numerous awards at both provincial and national levels.

The accommodation of women's interests and needs constitutes an essential component of the development process, particularly at the village level. This not only results in policies that respond to women's needs but also enables the inclusion of other marginalized groups whose needs have previously been overlooked. This demonstrates the commitment of a village leader to gender-based development.

Women's involvement in the policy-making and program development processes in Senggreng Village has ultimately helped reduce the gap between men and women. As expressed by RF (40), a housewife and resident of Senggreng Village, women are now included by the village head in meetings related to village development programs—something that had never occurred before.

The initiatives taken by the Head of Senggreng Village to involve women in the formulation of development policies and programs demonstrate her commitment to gender-based development by integrating the needs of both women and men equally in all village programs. This reinforces the notion that women's leadership is capable of creating policies that are not only innovative but also fair and responsive to gender-specific needs.

Through an inclusive and participatory approach, development policies and programs in Senggreng Village have become not only more effective but also have had a direct impact on improving the quality of life of the community, particularly women. Moreover, this demonstrates that innovative, responsive, and participatory women's leadership can bring about positive and significant changes in village development.

Undeniably, the initiatives implemented by the Head of Senggreng Village serve as a positive example for other regions not only in Malang Regency but also more broadly. The implementation of gender-responsive programs can create positive impacts on women's access to development and village governance.

Conclusion

Women's representation in public leadership roles, including village leadership, is anticipated to stimulate transformative social change. This leadership can help accommodate women's needs within development policies and programs at the village level. The inclusion of women's interests constitutes an essential aspect of the development process, especially within rural communities. It produces policies that not only meet women's needs but also address the needs of other marginalized groups whose interests have historically been overlooked. Therefore, women's participation in the policy-making process of village development is crucial, as it can generate policies that genuinely respond to women's needs. Senggreng Village, currently led by a female village head, has succeeded in accommodating the needs of women's groups, particularly in the fields of Village Development and Community Empowerment.

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