

Jurnal Pemberdayaan Masyarakat *Media Pemikiran dan Dakwah Pembangunan*

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage:
<https://ejournal.uin-suka.ac.id/dakwah/JPMI/index>

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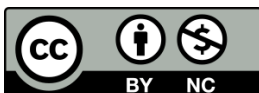
To cite this article: Sari Viciawati Machdum, Kania Saraswati Harisoesyanti, & Isbandi Rukminto Adi (2024): Reducing Social Disintegration and Economic Inequality through Community-Based Program for a More Equitable Society, Jurnal Pemberdayaan Masyarakat: Media Pemikiran dan Dakwah Pembangunan, DOI: 10.14421/jpm.2024.081-01

Type of paper: Research article

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpm.2024.081-01>

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Reducing Social Disintegration and Economic Inequality through Community-Based Program for a More Equitable Society

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ABSTRACT

The socio-economic disparity in the Margahayu area, exacerbated by its proximity to an elite residential neighbourhood, has led residents to normalize their economic hardships, employment challenges, and low education levels. This research aims to conduct social engineering through targeted interventions. Qualitative methods and applied research techniques were chosen to support a three-stage intervention process: look, think, and act. Applying these stages resulted in a detailed mapping of the interrelated economic, social, and health conditions in the community. To address these issues, the analysis identified potential resources, such as "Rumah Belajar"—an educational initiative supported by residents of the elite neighbourhood—and the successful efforts of health workers in maintaining a healthy environment. These resources have often been overlooked, making education and health vulnerabilities more pronounced. Activating these resources emerged as a viable intervention strategy, encouraging the younger generation to maximize their potential and skills. Utilizing existing resources from daily experiences proved to be more effective in improving community living standards.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 26 August 2023

Accepted 30 June 2024

KEYWORDS

Inequality, Social Disintegration, Community based, Action Research, Community Integration

Introduction

The rapid development of new residential areas has left surrounding regions (Firman, 2009; Winarso & Firman, 2002), such as Margahayu, grappling with complex socio-economic problems. Social disparities that were once only visible through quantitative measures are now starkly evident in the everyday lives of the Margahayu community, juxtaposed with nearby elite residential areas. Occupational identity and education level, previously known only through statistics, have become clear indicators of economic status (Hughes et al., 2024). Inequality has become normalized, with the community showing a tendency to accept their socio-economic plight, weakening efforts to overcome these

limitations. Although interventions from wealthier neighboring communities once brought significant social change, such efforts have diminished, leaving only memories of past support. A new intervention model is needed for the Margahayu community to draw on past experiences and strive to improve their quality of life, aiming to reduce the socio-economic disparities exacerbated by intense regional development.

The exploration of historical components of social development as an alternative mechanism for community empowerment has often been neglected by researchers. Existing studies have focused on youth development while overlooking historical experiences, making adaptation to new, unfamiliar models more difficult and time-consuming. There are three predominant trends in past research approaches to this issue. Firstly, reformulation of Children's Knowledge Formation: Efforts to improve quality of life have been limited to specific contexts, such as refugee camps (Metzler et al., 2021) or orphanages (Heron & Chakrabarti, 2003). Secondly, education Equity. Social inequality is often attributed to educational disparities, leading researchers to advocate for equal opportunities in education to address these issues (Kubisch et al., 2020; Sucipto et al., 2021). Thirdly, identification of Social Disintegration: Researchers identify social disparities in relation to health issues (Giachello et al., 2019), environmental concerns (Nikli et al., 2020), and social tensions (Ye & Shu, 2022). These three trends have neglected the potential of past social networks to be actualized as solutions for addressing contemporary social problems.

This research aims to address the challenges faced by the Margahayu community by identifying solutions that can foster community development and empowerment. To achieve this, the researcher implemented a three-step intervention model. The first step involved observing the socio-economic conditions to identify key variables that could drive improvement in the community's socio-economic status. The second step entailed analyzing various local potentials to uncover the root causes of the socio-economic disparities affecting Margahayu. The third step focused on implementing an action plan to provide solutions to critical issues faced by the community. These three steps are designed to work continuously to generate social change through targeted interventions.

The application of the intervention model is based on the belief that social problems affecting a community should not be seen as isolated issues, but rather as consequences of broader, more systemic problems. Addressing the issues faced by a group requires understanding the experiences of individuals as they interact with the larger social community (Mills, 2000). Efforts to uplift economically marginalized groups necessitate recognizing historical experiences that highlight their collective relationships with more economically advantaged communities. According to Giddens (2006), this approach encourages communities to reactivate independent thinking by reflecting on past experiences. Intervention serves merely as a catalyst, helping to transform past experiences into tools for generating new, more autonomous, and constructive actions.

Literature Review

Socio-economic inequality: Causes identification mechanism

The understanding of socio-economic inequality has shifted from class relations to spatial relations, which highlight unequal social interests (Butler & Watt, 2007). Spatial inequality affects economic, educational, and property disparities. The spatial perspective is not the only new approach to defining socio-economic inequality. Sociological imagination is also employed to address inequality arising from the ambiguous relationship between 'private troubles' and 'public issues' (Romero, 2020; Roy & Uekusa, 2020). This review consistently focuses on the interaction between social structures and actions, which ultimately shapes the identity of socio-economic inequality within a society.

Bradley (1999) argues that identifying socio-economic inequality solely through class identity is insufficient, as it fails to encompass the distinct dynamics of gender, ethnicity, and age. He proposes that a more comprehensive class analysis should explore how various inequality dynamics intersect and intertwine, thereby creating identification mechanisms based on diverse patterns. Some researchers establish economic and social hierarchies using occupational classifications to assess their impact on other variables, such as mortality rates (Wilkinson, 2022), health (Raghupathi & Raghupathi, 2020; Wilson et al., 2020), and education (Budiharso & Tarman, 2020).

Maternal mortality rates, health, and education are closely linked to social issues that cannot be separated from economic, political, and cultural aspects. (Machdum et al., 2017; Machdum et al., 2018). The issue of socio-economic inequality at the macro level is closely tied to the development gap between major cities and the satellite cities that surround them. This gap has persisted for over 30 years, with development efforts primarily focusing on major cities in Indonesia. In addition, the high number of impoverished individuals in Indonesia and the welfare system's efforts to address poverty-related challenges also contribute to the country's current social issues (Adi, 2013).

Inequality has unfortunately increased while the job market has become increasingly diverse (Hill, 2021). This has made poverty reduction efforts more complicated, particularly considering our current age of information and digital technology (Fitzpatrick, 2005). In the current era of digital expansion, we are witnessing notable shifts in the structure of society.

In response to the escalating socio-economic disparities following the economic crisis of 1997/1998 (Hill, 2021), the government has undertaken a decentralized approach to implement social welfare programs through various government initiatives (Prasetio, 2018). Faguet (2014) emphasizes that an effective decentralization system is essential for improving the accountability and responsiveness of the government, particularly at the local level. This decentralization should enable democratic and participatory implementation of government policies and processes. By devolving power to local authorities and involving citizens in decision-making, the government can better address the diverse needs and preferences of its population.

To achieve sustainable social change and economic development, it is essential to adopt a developmental view that emphasizes community participation. This approach allows for the involvement of local communities in the decision-making process and promotes a sense of ownership and responsibility for the success of developmental initiatives. Through this participatory development model, communities can actively engage with the developmental process, provide valuable insights, and contribute to the creation of solutions that are tailored to their unique needs and challenges. This not only leads to more effective and sustainable outcomes but also fosters a greater sense of community cohesion and empowerment (Zastrow, 2017). Ife (2013) argue that a community development program has the potential to serve as a crucial connection between underprivileged individuals and those living in poverty. In the current era of globalization, society has undergone a significant shift from *Gemeinschaft*, characterized by community ties and relationships, to *Gesellschaft*, characterized by more impersonal social connections. Despite this transformation, voluntary work and the social-economic inequality resulting from modernization can play a key role in bridging the economic disparities between these two groups through community-based service initiatives.

Enhancing Local Potential in Community Empowerment

Effectively utilizing local potential to improve community welfare is a fundamental element in the concept of empowerment. Recognizing one's own potential, character, and abilities contributes to developing the most appropriate and effective models and types of empowerments (Kurniawan & Cahyono, 2020). Leveraging local potential is seen as a means to optimize local wisdom as a tool for community development (Sulaiman et al., 2022). While the model of improving community welfare through local potential is widely regarded as effective, Ahmad and Abu Talib (2015) express concern over the vulnerability to control by local elites, which could impede welfare improvement.

The mechanism for improving community welfare by enhancing local potential can be implemented through various approaches. Desi Sukmawati and Rina Maryanti (2021) suggest that boosting local potential can be achieved by increasing literacy among young people. While formal education mechanisms are not the primary choice for developing local communities' capabilities, informal approaches to improving abilities and skills are also considered vital (Mulyono et al., 2020). Additionally, optimizing local potential can involve providing extra funds to overcome financial limitations (Wali et al., 2017). As argued by Putnam (1994), communities possess the power to facilitate social interactions that yield beneficial outcomes for all members involved. By harnessing this potential, communities can foster an environment of cooperation and mutual support, leading to positive outcomes for everyone. On a broader scale, decentralization policies that enable independent resource management are pursued to maximize the development process and achieve community welfare (Ahmad & Abu Talib, 2015).

Empowerment-based Developing Children's Potential

The tendency to focus empowerment efforts on solving social problems among the elderly leads to unsustainable empowerment mechanisms. This view stems from the belief that empowering young people, especially children, should prioritize 'prevention' rather than positive youth development. Morrison et al. (1997) argue that effective and sustainable community development can only be achieved by nurturing young people's potential to elevate living standards according to their needs and talents. This understanding has given rise to the empowerment movement through youth and child development. Research by Robert Halpern (1992) and Robbie Gilligan (1998) provides clear evidence of a shift in community improvement models towards empowering children and young people. In fact, the development of children and young people have become a new strategy for addressing solution-oriented social problems.

Researchers identify improving community welfare through youth empowerment as achievable via educational development and reforming educational institutions. Enhancing educational institutions by increasing school effectiveness, involving the community, and implementing internal management changes supports the empowerment of children (Óskarsdóttir et al., 2020). Amanda Tattersall (2020) present an interesting claim, arguing that increasing children's ability to drive social change involves partnering with institutions and community groups. Local partnership contributes to education's impact on more intensive development. According to Dawson et al. (2021), internal mechanisms are crucial because local people best understand their own basic problems, allowing for effective and efficient problem-solving.

Method

This study explored the socio-economic problems of the Margahayu community using qualitative methods within an applied research model. The qualitative method was chosen to analyze behavior and identify appropriate interventions for behavior change (Burney et al., 2023). The applied research model was employed to facilitate intervention through three stages: observation (look), analysis (think), and intervention (act) (Stringer, 2014). The focus of the study was the Margahayu community, characterized by low socio-economic conditions within an elite residential area. To achieve effective intervention, this research utilized a participatory action research model, allowing researchers to be directly involved in the intervention process.

Results

The Look of Margahayu social environment: The mapping economic area

The Margarahayu Sub-district is strategically positioned on the main access route connecting Bogor, Jakarta, and the industrial city of Bandung. It is also adjacent to the elite residential area of Villa Nugraha, inhabited by economically established residents.

Despite these advantageous geographical conditions, the community faces significant social, economic, and health challenges. Economic problems are the primary issue, affecting various other aspects of life. The area's economic limitations are evident in the unorganized settlement conditions, with overcrowded, poorly constructed, and uninhabitable houses. The close proximity of the houses results in insufficient sunlight and high humidity (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Margahayu community settlement condition.

Observations indicate that the economic issues in Margahayu are influenced by three interrelated factors: education level, unemployment, and livelihoods. These factors contribute to the community's conditions, which differ markedly from those of the surrounding areas.

The educational attainment in the Margahayu community is predominantly low, with most residents having only completed junior high school. Data indicate that this low level of education is primarily due to a high dropout rate, driven by the community's economic hardships.

“I was just a Junior High School graduate, and my brother was also a Junior High School graduate. But we usually do not continue our studies further. we don’t know how, Miss, we have no money. Our youngest child is already in Junior High School in the third grade. We don’t know whether our child can continue to Senior High School or not. If we have the money, we can finance our child to continue his/her studies.”

These financial constraints hinder children who wish to pursue higher education. This situation is prevalent in many families, leading to a normalization of junior secondary education as the highest level achieved, and it is not perceived as a significant issue by most young people and their families. Consequently, the aspiration for higher education

remains low. Interview data reveal that the majority of children in Margahayu lack the desire to continue their education, thereby perpetuating the community's overall low educational level.

The community's limited economic conditions stem from the predominance of factory laborers and casual workers among its residents. This occupational choice is tied to their economic situation, which they believe restricts their employment options. One community member mentioned that the desire to start a business is consistently hindered by limited capital, leading many to prefer freelance work—men as construction workers and women as laundry workers, both with small and irregular incomes. Additionally, layoffs from several factories have led to high unemployment rates among Margahayu residents.

Thinking of solutions to Margahayu's economic problems: A Community worker mechanism

The complex social and environmental problems faced by the Margahayu community can be mitigated by identifying and leveraging their available resources. Resource identification is a crucial asset for developing effective solutions. Observations have revealed two key aspects that can potentially strengthen the community and help rebuild the social environment of Margahayu. First, maximizing the function of 'Rumah Belajar' (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. The condition of the “Rumah Belajar” in the Margahayu area.

Rumah Belajar is a learning center established by the Margahayu community through the initiative of the Local Children's NGO (LCN), a social organization. According to an interview with the founder, Rumah Belajar was created to assist children in the impoverished areas of Margahayu, reflecting the social concern of the Pondok TM Housing community.

The management of 'Rumah Belajar' as a foundational resource for community education accessible to the low-income residents of Margahayu holds significant potential for enhancing education. However, researchers' observations indicate that the institution is not functioning as intended. The primary issue is the manager's lack of focus on the management process, compounded by limited experience in conceptualizing an effective educational framework. Learning effectiveness is hampered by a curriculum that does not align with the students' age groups. The manager admitted that both he and other administrators lack the necessary educational background to develop a suitable curriculum and face financial constraints. Improving the managerial aspects of the institution is crucial for advancing education, which is the primary challenge in Margahayu's social environment.

Second, health insurance. Medical personnel in the Margahayu area work to ensure public health by optimizing health services. Health workers routinely conduct check-ups for the elderly through the Integrated Service Post (Posbindu) program and for children and toddlers through the integrated service post (Posyandu). Additionally, they conduct regular health training sessions under the coordination of the local Community Health Center (Puskesmas) through the Rukun Warga (RW) Siaga program. However, health workers face challenges such as limited funding and a lack of community awareness to support health improvement initiatives.

Improving the function of community resources: Actions to deal with problems

To reduce the impact of social and environmental problems, the community leverages its potential resources by enhancing their functions. This involves three stages to concretely implement the program on two key resources: maximizing the function of 'Rumah Belajar' and improving the RW Siaga program. In the process of enhancing 'Rumah Belajar,' the planning focused on two main areas: restructuring its management and improving infrastructure. The initial stage of restructuring involved forming a dedicated management team to increase program effectiveness. Concurrently, infrastructure improvements were pursued through non-binding fundraising efforts to support social institutions.

The restructuring of the institution's management has led to an effective and efficient management mechanism. A notable innovation from the new management is the introduction of an early childhood education program, staffed by volunteers from the Margahayu community. Individuals with skills in dance and painting are engaged as teachers to nurture community talents from an early age. Community support is crucial for the success of this program, so efforts to shape positive perceptions include socialization through social media (Facebook) and direct interactions. Socialization efforts are creatively designed with activities such as 'learning is fun,' studio-based learning, and reactivating a monthly dues system of IDR 5,000.

A well-structured action plan has led to the effective and successful implementation of the program. Utilizing brochures for socialization has proven to be an effective strategy

in increasing parents' willingness to enroll their children. During the implementation phase, the program has successfully enrolled 19 children, each with different learning preferences. Some children attend classes directly at 'Rumah Belajar,' while others opt for home-based tutoring.



Figure 3: Children's enthusiasm in participating in learning at “Rumah Belajar”

The learning process is tailored to each child's potential and preferences, identified through the 'hope tree' exercise. Children with artistic inclinations are encouraged to explore their interests and talents, while those inclined towards science are guided accordingly. Similar efforts are undertaken to address health improvement challenges involving Puskesmas health workers. The limited health funds in the RW Siaga program are addressed by establishing a self-help fundraising team. This team raises funds through activities such as the Maternity Social Fund (Dasolin or Dana Sosial Ibu Bersalin), *Arisan Ibu Bersalin* (Arlin), and *Tabungan Ibu Hamil* (Tabulin). These funds help supplement the limited implementation of health insurance, particularly benefiting pregnant residents in preparing for childbirth.

Discussion

The socio-economic vulnerability of the Margahayu community stems from an ongoing economic situation that negatively impacts the community's social conditions. This persistent situation is often perceived as normal, hindering efforts to improve living standards. The lack of functional resources needed to support and enhance welfare and health exemplifies this issue. Enhancing the functionality of existing resources presents an opportunity for social transformation, leading to improved education levels and increased health insurance for vulnerable populations. Efforts to revitalize abandoned resources, such as maximizing the function of the “Learning House” and improving safety

guarantees for pregnant women, have been positively received. This is evidenced by the growing enthusiasm of children and adolescents to engage in skill development activities. "Learning House" as a community-based program can fulfill the needs of disadvantaged communities. According to Friedlander & Apte (1980), this type of intervention has been used to improve lives since the beginning of social intervention history. Ife (2013) argues that community-based programs not only offer direct services but also enable communities to manage various escalating disparities in the modern era of development.

The social reality experienced by the Margahayu community is not due to a lack of awareness about improving welfare. Instead, it stems from the broader social community's dysfunction in actively engaging with the Margahayu community's challenges. Drawing on Charles W. Mills' (2000) perspective, the normalization of the socio-economic problems faced by Margahayu residents results from the disparity between their area and neighboring regions with better socio-economic conditions. Addressing this issue requires examining the historical context of broader community relations (Harvey, 2006; Solis-Gadea, 2006). This approach makes the actualization and reformulation of "Rumah Belajar," as part of the history of social care relations, relevant for revitalizing efforts to improve the socio-economic status of the Margahayu community through its younger generation. The involvement of young volunteers from various socio-economic backgrounds provides proof that community development can help counteract the effects of societal erosion (Ife, 2013). In this manner, the community can effectively address socio-economic disparities.

The effectiveness of reorganizing social platforms that connect disadvantaged communities with more developed ones highlights that social responsibility plays a crucial role in community empowerment. Social responsibility, rooted in historical awareness of past relationships, brings forward familiar patterns of routine activities, offering solutions to current challenges (Mulgan, 2022; Pedwell, 2021; Wilk, 2020). This context underscores the effectiveness of restructuring the "Rumah Belajar" and enhancing health services to support the sustainable development of the Margahayu community, utilizing familiar patterns and mechanisms. Mills (2000) emphasizes that increasing social activities can be achieved by employing known models and methods, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of social change.

Social change, a key indicator in community development through the repurposing of known resources, has often been overlooked by researchers. Empowerment efforts typically focus on identifying fundamental problems, but this approach does not always guarantee solutions, often necessitating partnerships (Giachello et al., 2019; Kubisch et al., 2020). Character enhancement, which impacts knowledge growth through education, targets variables that directly influence motivation (Sucipto et al., 2021), thus efforts to improve welfare are predominantly based on increasing education levels (Metzler et al., 2021). However, many researchers have neglected the exploration of historical components of social development as an alternative mechanism for community empowerment.

The utilization of local potential to enhance welfare through the application of historical experiences and available resources supports an empowerment mechanism grounded in local potential. Kurniawan and Cahyono (2020) view this approach as the most appropriate and effective. Besides contributing to improved welfare, leveraging local potential helps preserve local wisdom (Sulaiman et al., 2022). This study identifies local potential through historical experiences, emphasizing informal methods to enhance skills. Such informal mechanisms for skill improvement are crucial in the community empowerment process (Wali et al., 2017).

Conclusion

Optimizing the function of the abandoned "Rumah Belajar" to enhance the capacity of the Margahayu community for a better life supports local potential as a foundation for empowerment. Reactivating an institution that once played a key role in educating the younger generation not only revitalizes its purpose but also fosters communal relationships between economically disadvantaged areas and neighboring elite areas. These relationships encourage greater social imagination, helping to break down economic barriers. This model of social bonding between economically limited individuals and their wealthier neighbors can facilitate empowerment at various levels.

The communal ties formed through the "Rumah Belajar" institution, familiar to the Margahayu community, were identified using sociological analysis of social problems. This analytical model enables researchers to reconsider the socio-economic realities faced by the Margahayu community through observation, critical thinking, and concrete actions. However, this study did not examine the dynamics of the teaching process at "Rumah Belajar." Observing this process is essential to identify potential obstacles that could hinder the sustainability of activities. This limitation opens new avenues for further research to refine the findings of this study.

Acknowledgement

We express our sincere appreciation for the valuable contributions of The Higher Education National Strategic Grants Scheme for funding this research. Our deep gratitude also for Staffs, Researcher at the Department of Social Welfare Science, Universitas Indonesia, all informants and organizations involved in this research.

Author's declaration

We confirm that each author of this article has contributed as follows: The authors made substantial contributions to the conception and design of the study. The authors took responsibility for data analysis, interpretation, and discussion of results. The authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Availability of data and materials

All data are available from the authors.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interest.

Additional information

No additional information from the authors.

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