



Understanding the role and challenges of social workers in empowering remote indigenous communities

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ABSTRACT

Remote indigenous communities are one of the targets of social work intervention in Indonesia. Various community empowerment policies and programs as well as various psychosocial intervention approaches have been implemented to help resolve their various economic, social, educational and health problems. This research aims to analyze the role and challenges of social workers in empowering remote communities. This research uses a qualitative approach with descriptive methods. The research results show that the role of social workers is very important in empowering Remote Indigenous Communities (KAT). With their roles as enablers, brokers, mediators, advocates, educators and protectors, social workers are able to overcome various challenges faced by KAT, including limited resources and social stigma. An approach that is sensitive to the culture and needs of indigenous communities, as well as collaboration with various related parties, is key in ensuring the success of the KAT empowerment program. Thus, the role of social workers is crucial in ensuring that empowerment efforts are carried out effectively, sustainably, and respect cultural diversity and human rights.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, as the largest archipelagic country in the world, boasts of its cultural diversity and ethnic diversity. Throughout this archipelago, there are thousands of tribal groups who have long lived and coexisted with nature (Faoziah, 2023). In Indonesian terminology, they are known as "indigenous people". Some of them even live in remote areas that are difficult for outsiders to access. Despite geographical isolation, these indigenous communities maintain a rich cultural heritage, traditions and value systems. They often have a close relationship with the surrounding environment, practicing life patterns related to local wisdom and natural sustainability (Wibowo, 2019). Even though they live in modern times, indigenous peoples still adhere to their traditions and customs, which often become valuable assets for the Indonesian nation in maintaining cultural diversity and a unique environment (Dewi et al, 2020).

Geographic remoteness often results in significant challenges for indigenous communities in Indonesia. With the long distance from urban centers and limited infrastructure, access to various social, economic, educational and health services is hampered (Sidiq, 2020). Indigenous people living in remote areas often face difficulties in gaining access to adequate health facilities, quality education, and equitable economic opportunities (Zaki et al, 2023). Apart from that, limited infrastructure such as damaged roads or no electricity network also affects the fulfillment of basic needs such as clean water and electricity. As a result, indigenous communities are often socially and economically marginalized, with their potential for development and progress hampered by these geographical constraints (Adnan, 2018).

Geographic remoteness is often the root of the pressing problem of poverty, along with limitations in fulfilling other basic needs (Elanda & Alie, 2023). Poverty, as a condition, refers to the inability of a person or group to meet the essential needs necessary to live a life of dignity and worth. This includes basic needs such as food, clothing, health, education, employment,

housing, clean water, access to natural resources, as well as protection from threats of violence and the right to participate in socio-political life (Suyanto & Mujiyadi, 2013). In the context of indigenous communities in remote areas, limited access to resources and public services creates an environment that supports poverty. The lack of equal economic opportunities and limited social infrastructure such as health and education worsen the economic and social conditions of these communities (Andriyus et al, 2021).

Remote Indigenous Communities (KAT) which are defined in Presidential Regulation Number 186 of 2014 are a community group consisting of a number of individuals who are bound by geographical, economic and/or socio-cultural unity (Rusmiyati, 2020). They are categorized as poor communities, remote, and/or socio-economically vulnerable. As a result of geographic remoteness and other constraints, remote indigenous communities often face significant economic and social challenges. Therefore, they are recognized as one of the targets of social work intervention in Indonesia (Rifai, 2016). Through a social work approach, efforts are made to provide assistance that suits their needs, such as access to basic services such as health and education, infrastructure development, and sustainable economic programs (Kurniasari, 2006).

In facing the challenges faced by indigenous community groups (KAT) due to geographical remoteness and poverty, it is important for the government and various related institutions to provide special treatment that takes into account their needs and conditions (Tumanggor, 2007). This special treatment reflects a commitment to ensure that their basic rights are properly recognized and fulfilled. Various community empowerment policies and programs as well as psychosocial intervention approaches have been implemented to help resolve the various economic, social, educational and health problems they face (Sujarwani et al, 2018). Concrete steps such as infrastructure development, providing access to basic services such as health and education, as well as sustainable economic programs are the main focus in supporting the welfare of indigenous communities (Unayah & Sabarisman, 2016).

This special handling effort aims to empower indigenous communities so they can live equally with other Indonesian citizens. This also involves strengthening community capacity in managing natural resources sustainably, developing skills and economic opportunities, and strengthening social networks and local institutions (Eliza et al, 2018). In addition, a psychosocial intervention approach is also carried out to support the mental and emotional well-being of indigenous people, overcome stigmatism, and build self-confidence and pride in their cultural identity. Thus, through this effort, it is hoped that indigenous communities can overcome the challenges they face and become an empowered part in building a better future for the Indonesian nation as a whole (Mardiyati & Gutomo, 2018).

As members of society who are equal in their rights and responsibilities as citizens, Remote Indigenous Communities (KAT) have the same rights to live in prosperity, get access to basic social services, participate in development, and receive protection from all conditions that could disturb them, whether that is socially, culturally, economically, legally and politically (Nurwahyuningsih, 2022). Protection and fulfillment of KAT's rights is an integral part of the government's responsibility in ensuring welfare and justice for all its citizens. In this context, the government's attention and fair treatment of KAT is very important, as is expected from the state in fulfilling the rights of citizens in general. Through this approach, the state carries out its obligations to ensure that every citizen, including KAT, can enjoy their rights fully, and be actively involved in the development and progress of the nation as a whole (Kartini & Siregar, 2017).

This research aims to explore a deeper understanding of how social work carried out by social workers can contribute to efforts to empower remote indigenous communities in Indonesia. Through this research, it is hoped that the role played by social workers in improving welfare and justice for the community can be identified, while also identifying the challenges

faced in implementing empowerment programs. By understanding these roles and challenges, this research can provide a clearer view of how governments, non-governmental organizations, and social work practitioners can work effectively to support the progress and well-being of remote indigenous communities.

METHOD

The research method applied in this study is a descriptive method with a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the role and challenges of social workers in empowering remote indigenous communities, as explained by Yulianah (2022). The data used is secondary, obtained through studying documents related to this topic. Data analysis was carried out using qualitative descriptive analysis techniques, namely the stages of data reduction, data presentation and drawing conclusions. The results of data analysis are then used to gain a better understanding of the role and challenges of social work in efforts to empower remote indigenous communities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Social Workers in Empowering Remote Indigenous Communities

In the context of fulfilling the social welfare of citizens, implementing empowerment programs for Remote Indigenous Communities (KAT) is very important to improve their standard of living. The basic principles of this empowerment program must be rooted in the local wisdom values that are the identity of the KAT community. This approach not only provides a strong foundation, but also becomes a valuable social resource in encouraging active participation and program sustainability at the community level. Thus, through empowerment programs that integrate local values, the KAT community can be better involved in efforts to improve their welfare, while also maintaining and strengthening their cultural heritage and identity as an inseparable part of the wealth of the Indonesian nation.

Therefore, the role of social workers is needed in empowering remote indigenous communities (KAT). There are 6 roles that social workers can play in empowering KAT in Indonesia.

1. Social Worker as Enabler/Facilitator

In the field of social work, the role of the facilitator is often considered key in helping individuals or groups to achieve desired changes. This concept is also often interchanged with the term "enabler". As explained by Parsons, Jorgensen, and Hernandez (1994: 188), the traditional role of an enabler in social work includes several aspects, including education, facilitation, and promotion of interaction and action. This role allows the Social Worker to serve as a liaison between clients and the resources necessary to achieve their goals. In addition, as a facilitator, the Social Worker helps clients to identify their needs and potential, and provides the necessary guidance and support during the change process.

By carrying out the role as an enabler or facilitator, Social Workers can make a significant contribution to the process of change and recovery for individuals or groups. Through an approach oriented towards meeting clients' needs and empowering them, Social Workers assist in articulating and facilitating the steps necessary to achieve desired goals. This includes providing emotional support, empowering clients to take control of their own lives, and helping them to develop the skills and strategies necessary to overcome existing obstacles. Thus, the role of facilitator or enabler in social work not only enables desired changes to occur, but also promotes the independence and empowerment of the individuals or groups served.

2. Social Worker as Broker

In the context of empowering Remote Indigenous Communities (KAT), the role of broker has an important role in ensuring their access to the resources needed. First, through the principle of linking, social workers are tasked with connecting KAT with institutions or parties that have the necessary resources, such as access to health, education and housing services. In addition, social workers can also help identify and connect KAT with available social assistance or legal aid programs. Second, through the provision of goods and services, social workers can help ensure that KATs have access to physical goods such as food, clothing and medicine, as well as services such as skills training, counseling and childcare. .

Furthermore, social workers need to have the appropriate knowledge and skills to carry out their role as brokers effectively. First, they must be able to carry out a community needs assessment for KAT, which includes an understanding of the types and types of needs, distribution of needs, and patterns of service use. Furthermore, social workers need to have knowledge and skills in building consortia and networks between organizations. This involves working with various agencies and organizations to examine existing policies, define the role and potential and constraints of each agency, and develop procedures to avoid duplication of services and address gaps in social services for KAT. Thus, the role as a broker is key in facilitating the empowerment and welfare of these remote indigenous communities.

3. Social Worker as Mediator

The role of mediator, which is often carried out by social workers, is crucial in supporting relief efforts for Remote Indigenous Communities (KAT). This mediation is especially important when there are significant differences or conflicts between various parties, including between KAT residents and institutions or governments involved in empowerment programs. Social workers act as mediators to facilitate effective communication and overcome misunderstandings that may arise, so that empowerment activities can take place smoothly. Here, mediation activities include making behavioral contracts, negotiations, the role of third party mediator, as well as various other conflict resolution methods. In the mediation process, the aim is to reach a solution that is profitable for all parties involved, or what is often referred to as a win-win solution.

In contrast to the role of an advocate, where the social worker aims to win the client's case or help the client win for themselves, the role of the mediator focuses more on resolving the conflict and finding a solution that is acceptable to all parties involved. Thus, through this mediator role, social workers are able to make a significant contribution in ensuring that the relationship between KAT residents and institutions or the government remains harmonious, so that the goal of empowering remote indigenous communities can be achieved optimally.

4. Social Workers as Defense Advocates

In an effort to guarantee the needs and resources required by Remote Indigenous Communities (KAT), social workers often have to interact with the political system. This is important to ensure that services and resources that are difficult for clients to reach can be accessed appropriately. At times like that, the role of a defender or advocate becomes very relevant. The advocacy role in social work is a practice related to political activity, where social workers seek to fight for the interests and rights of their clients. Some strategies that can be implemented in this advocacy role include openness in listening to various views, representing all parties involved in decision making, ensuring equality in the decision making process, reducing hostility, presenting information transparently and supported by accurate documents and analysis, supporting participation broad, and shows sensitivity to the interests and positions of others.

Through this advocacy role, social workers can become a voice that articulates the needs and interests of KAT in the political realm. They act as agents of change fighting for rights and justice for remote indigenous communities. By using effective advocacy strategies, social workers can help reduce existing inequalities and disparities, and ensure that KAT voices are heard and considered in decision-making processes that affect their lives and well-being.

5. Workers as Educators

In efforts to socialize the Remote Indigenous Community Empowerment (KAT) program, social workers have a dual role as educators and knowledge transferers. Some people may not fully understand aspects related to the program, such as the laws that regulate it, its operationalization, as well as the aims and functions of the program. In this context, social workers play a role in providing relevant knowledge regarding the KAT Empowerment program. They not only provide information about the legal and operational aspects of the program, but also facilitate understanding of the program's objectives and benefits for remote indigenous communities.

Apart from that, social workers also serve as knowledge transferers by providing information about various external sources that can support the program, such as funding sources, expert sources, and various program implementation instructions. They can also hold presentations and trainings to provide the community with a deeper understanding of how the program can be run effectively. Through their dual role as educators and knowledge transferers, social workers contribute to ensuring that the community can take an active part in the KAT Empowerment program and obtain maximum benefits from these empowerment efforts.

6. Social Worker as Protector

Social workers' responsibilities towards the community, including Remote Indigenous Communities (KAT), are supported by a legal basis that provides legitimacy for their role as protectors. The law provides a strong basis for social workers to protect and fight for the rights of vulnerable and weak individuals, as is often the case with KAT. In the role of protector, social workers act in the interests of victims, potential victims, and other populations at risk. They use a variety of capabilities that include power, influence, authority, and social control to ensure that the rights and well-being of the individuals and groups they serve are guaranteed.

In the context of Remote Indigenous Communities, the role of protector is very important in facing the various challenges and threats they face. Social workers not only act as guardians who protect KAT from exploitation and marginalization, but also as mediators in bridging relationships between KAT and various related institutions and parties. By basing their actions on a solid legal foundation, social workers are committed to ensuring that the rights of remote indigenous peoples are recognized and protected fairly and equally within society. Through their role as protectors, social workers carry out a moral and ethical mission to fight for social justice and well-being for all members of society, including the most vulnerable and marginalized.

Challenges of Social Workers in Empowering Remote Indigenous Communities

In addition to the role of social workers in empowering KAT. Of the various challenges faced by social workers in empowering Remote Indigenous Communities (KAT), here are the five main challenges:

1. Limited Access

Geographical remoteness is the main challenge faced by social workers in efforts to provide services and facilitate empowerment programs to Remote Indigenous Communities (KAT). Remote geographic areas are often difficult to reach, with limited

transportation access and inadequate infrastructure. This makes it difficult for social workers to reach and interact directly with KATs, who may live in remote areas far from urban centers or main access areas. These limitations can slow down or even hinder the process of planning, implementing and evaluating empowerment programs, because social workers need additional time and resources to travel and communicate with indigenous communities.

In addition, geographic remoteness can also affect the availability and accessibility of resources needed to support empowerment programs. KAT living in remote areas may have limited access to health services, education, economic infrastructure, and other resources needed to improve their well-being. This can be a serious barrier to planning and implementing effective empowerment programs, as it requires additional efforts to identify and provide resources appropriate to the needs of the indigenous community. Therefore, to overcome this challenge, social workers need to develop innovative and inclusive strategies, and work together with various relevant parties to ensure that the necessary access and resources are available for KAT living in remote areas.

2. Resource Limitations

Limited resources are one of the crucial challenges faced by Remote Indigenous Communities (KAT) in their empowerment efforts. KAT often experiences limitations in terms of education, health and basic infrastructure. In the field of education, access to quality and well-trained schools is difficult for KATs who may live in remote areas, so education is often unavailable or limited. Health conditions are also a serious concern, with limited access to health services, medical personnel and adequate medical facilities. Basic infrastructure such as clean water, sanitation and electricity is also often inadequately available, worsening the living conditions and well-being of KATs.

This limited resource is the main obstacle in planning and implementing empowerment programs for KAT. Without adequate access to education, health and basic infrastructure, efforts to improve the welfare and strengthen the capacity of these indigenous communities are limited. Apart from that, limited resources can also hinder KAT members' active participation in empowerment programs, because their basic needs have not been properly met. Therefore, it is important for social workers and related parties to pay attention to and overcome these limited resources by providing better access to education, health and basic infrastructure, as well as ensuring that empowerment programs are designed and implemented taking into account the real conditions and needs of KAT .

3. Traditional Culture and Values

The unique value system and culture of Remote Indigenous Communities (KAT) are important factors that need to be considered in designing empowerment programs. Social workers must deeply understand the values, norms and traditions that are an integral part of KAT's daily life. Adequate involvement in understanding and respecting their culture and value systems will help build strong relationships between social workers and indigenous communities. This will help in creating a conducive environment and reduce the potential for conflict and incompatibility between the proposed empowerment program and the real needs and aspirations of KAT.

Furthermore, respect for KAT culture and values is also important to maintain the sustainability and effectiveness of empowerment programs. By paying attention to the unique culture and traditions of indigenous communities, social workers can design strategies that are more relevant and sustainable. Programs that are adapted to cultural contexts will be more accepted and adopted by indigenous communities, thereby increasing opportunities to achieve sustainable empowerment goals. Therefore, respect for the KAT value system and culture is an important basis in designing and implementing successful and sustainable empowerment programs.

4. Stigma and Discrimination

Stigma and discrimination are serious challenges faced by Remote Indigenous Communities (KAT) in interactions with the wider community. KATs are often targets of negative stereotypes and discrimination due to their different cultures, traditions and lifestyles. This can result in social isolation, difficulty in gaining access to services and resources, and adverse psychological impacts for KAT members. Therefore, social workers play an important role in overcoming this stigma and discrimination by building inclusive relationships and promoting a better understanding of cultural diversity.

Social workers must strive to address stigma and discrimination with a sensitive and empathetic approach. They can do this by providing education and awareness to the wider community about cultural diversity and human rights, as well as holding intercultural dialogue activities to promote mutual understanding and tolerance. Additionally, social workers can act as advocates for KATs, fighting for their rights and amplifying their voices in society. In this way, social workers can play a crucial role in helping KAT overcome stigma and discrimination, and build inclusive and harmonious relationships with the wider community.

5. Community Participation

Ensuring the active and inclusive participation of members of Remote Indigenous Communities (KAT) in every stage of an empowerment program is a significant challenge for social workers. Effective communication and building strong relationships with indigenous communities is essential to ensure that their voices and aspirations are recognized and considered in every decision made. However, sometimes, factors such as language, culture or low level of education can become barriers to active participation. Therefore, social workers need to build community capacity by providing training, education and guidance so that KAT members can understand the importance of their participation in planning, implementing and evaluating empowerment programs.

In addition, facilitating sustainable participation is also a challenge for social workers. This requires ongoing efforts to build trusting relationships between social workers and KAT members, and ensure that they feel valued and heard at every stage of the empowerment program. Social workers also need to actively identify and overcome barriers that may arise in the participation process, such as internal conflicts, differences of opinion, or disagreement with certain decisions. In this way, social workers can ensure that KAT members' participation is not just a formality, but actually makes a meaningful contribution and positively influences the outcomes of the empowerment program.

CONCLUSION

In empowering Remote Indigenous Communities (KAT), the role of social workers is crucial in ensuring that empowerment efforts are carried out effectively and sustainably. Through their roles as enablers, brokers, mediators, advocates, educators and protectors, social workers are able to overcome various challenges faced by KAT, ranging from limited resources to stigma and discrimination. With an approach that is sensitive to the values and needs of indigenous communities, as well as strong legal support, social workers can facilitate the active and inclusive participation of KATs in their own empowerment processes. Through collaborative and community-based efforts, KAT empowerment not only improves their standard of living, but also strengthens their cultural heritage and identity as an inseparable part of the wealth of the Indonesian nation. In efforts to empower Remote Indigenous Communities (KAT), social workers face several main challenges which include limited access due to geographical remoteness, limited resources, differences in culture and traditional values, stigma and discrimination, as well as active and inclusive community participation. However, with an approach that is sensitive to the cultural context and real needs of indigenous peoples,

and with close collaboration with various related parties, social workers can overcome these challenges and facilitate KAT empowerment. Thus, the role of social workers is crucial in ensuring that the KAT empowerment program is implemented effectively, sustainably, and respects cultural diversity and human rights.

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