

# The Role of Informal Leader in Community Development: Lessons from Mangrove Forest Conservation at Village of Pasar Banggi, Central Java, Indonesia

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## Abstract

This paper explores the pivotal and influential roles of an informal leader in community development at Pasar Banggi village, Rembang, Central Java particularly in relation to social capital, social scenarios of change, organization and local community participatory engagement in the development process. This paper, thus, presents social welfare perspective with qualitative approach by phenomenological method. As this paper was based on case studies, it deploys purposive technique to determine the key informants forwarding to next informants. Participatory observation and in-depth interviews were carried out to obtain information. The results were then analyzed through descriptive-qualitative analysis. The findings showed that the informal leader possessed natural ability in building up social capital, networks and trust in the community which revitalized socio-cultural and environmental values.

**Keywords:** Informal Leader (IL); Community Development (CD); Mangrove Conservation; Social Capital (SC)

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background

Many studies on mangrove forest conservation have been carried out previously. However, the studies mostly covered social, ecological, and economic aspects. From the social aspect, articles with this particular issue merely discussed functions of mangrove in relation to coastal areas protection. [1]

Some countries such as Thailand, India and Indonesia included, made the most use of mangrove to buffer coastal areas against huge storm surge well-known as tsunami. This way, the countries ran mangrove forest conservation movement designed as national program supported by their respective governments. Hence, the program involved the community participation in which active cooperation of the community members played a pivotal role.

This article deals with the roles of informal leaders (IL) in building up social capital and in organizing as well as mobilizing community members through mangrove forests conservation. This apparently dealt with socio-cultural dynamics in the process of community development (CD).

The participation of community members is frequently associated with the presence of IL who is able to encourage the community participation and eventually made significant contribution to the occurrence of dynamics.

As a matter of fact, studies on roles of IL in the CD process have been regularly conducted. The studies, though, were not specific and focused merely on mangrove forests conservation some of which were conducted by: [2], [3], [4]. Moreover, the role of IL in the CD was identified as an agent of social change. Whereas [9] argues IL played a pivotal role in the development of rural communities, particularly when CD was related to tourism sector.

In addition, IL also served as communicators, initiators, articulators, facilitators, and mediators for CD in rural areas [3], [5], [6], [7], [8]. However, as IL involvement has, so far, followed the standard operational procedure initiated by the government national program (top-down approach), the IL role was merely a formality and not properly performed.

Therefore, this study highlighted the process of bottom-up approach in CD. The roles of IL were actively promoted for the success of CD process through mangrove forests conservation.

### 1.2 Problem Formulation

The problem of the study is formulated in the following question: How are the roles of IL in the CD process?

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