Research Article

Policy Constraints on Local Governance for Community Resilience: Qualitative Insights from Stakeholders in Disaster-prone Areas

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Abstract.

This qualitative study examines the impact of central government policies on community resilience for disaster preparedness, explicitly focusing on the constraints faced by local governments. This study explores the challenges hindering optimal performance at the local level through 18 informants using focus group discussions with key stakeholders, including sub-district heads and village leaders. The findings reveal that central government policies pose significant hurdles to local governance in disaster-prone areas. These policies restrict local governments' decision-making authority and autonomy, impeding their ability to respond effectively to disaster risks and emergencies. Notably, the study highlights the presence of a community-led disaster management organization already in place, comprising members from within the community. The policy constraints identified include limited resource allocation, bureaucratic procedures, and a need for more flexibility in decision making. Stakeholders express concerns regarding rigid central government frameworks that do not recognize or account for the unique needs of individual communities. The study emphasizes the importance of policy reforms to empower and support local governments and their existing disaster management organizations. This research contributes to understanding community resilience by highlighting the vital role of local governance and community-led organizations in disaster preparedness.

Keywords: community, disaster, government policies, resilience

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1. INTRODUCTION

Indo-Australian, Eurasia, and Pacific tectonic plates all encircle Indonesia. As a result, the nation frequently experiences hazardous seismic activity, such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and other natural disasters.[1] Natural and man-made hazards have caused and continue to cause significant loss of life and property worldwide. Humans and their property are the two most vulnerable things when natural disasters strike. To effectively reduce the probability of catastrophes in these two categories, catastrophe specialists concentrate on developing techniques in this area.[2]

Vulnerability to hazards and subsequent impacts has increased over the past decades due to weak disaster policies, ineffective governance, and sustainable infrastructure.

Many communities have to defend themselves, struggling in the response and recovery phases to provide financial and physical resources after a disaster. An attainable feature of sustainable development is creating resilience in the face of catastrophic events.[3]Meanwhile, natural disasters have increased in frequency and severity in Indonesia, both in terms of accidents and deaths. In 2019, natural disasters increased by 7.2%, while the death toll increased by 192%.[4]

Indonesia is divided into five layers of government, Which are central, provinces, Kabupaten (districts) and Kota (municipalities), kecamatan (subdistricts), and kelurahan/desa (villages). Before the present reform, there had only been minimal implementation of effective devolution of authority and financial resources to lower tiers of government. The task of the central government was to appoint local officials, carry out central planning, and directly finance local governments for producing public goods and funding for the general administration. The central government focuses on five functions that affect the nation. Another function was to local governments, districts, and municipalities. The central government's power is limited to six areas: finance, foreign affairs, defense, security, religion, and state administration and justice.[5]

Information problems can also affect the management and financing of disaster risk. Some stakeholders can underestimate or ignore the danger they face. Additionally, some homeowners and even business owners may incorrectly believe that their home or property insurance covers the risk of floods and earthquakes when it does not. Further, some property owners may mistakenly think that the government will fully cover any uninsured losses they may suffer from a natural disaster, which is rarely the case. These information problems can cause underinvestment in risk mitigation and/or the failure to purchase adequate insurance absent any government requirements for risk mitigation and insurance.[6] An interdisciplinary approach is essential to develop disaster risk reduction strategies successfully.[7] Furthermore, community involvement with support from non-governmental organizations and government agencies—is critical to disaster preparedness, as individual efforts by areas at risk of disaster are insufficient. Involving the community before a disaster strikes will help locals identify their resources, knowledge, and emergency response adaptations. Therefore, participation in disaster preparedness by the community serves as a social mechanism that allows communities at risk of disasters to come together in the case of an emergency that calls for self-rescue and the utilization of all available resources.[8]

2. METHOD

The study employed a qualitative research approach to delve into the impact of central government policies on community resilience concerning disaster preparedness. It specifically targeted the challenges experienced by 18 persons of local governments in the Bandung district. To gather comprehensive insights, focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with pivotal stakeholders, which included leaders from sub-districts and villages. The focus was to unearth the barriers that impede optimal community resilience to disasters at the grassroots level. During these FGDs, all data was meticulously recorded. Moreover, field notes played a pivotal role in capturing the essence of the discussions. As defined by Anggito & Setiawan, field notes encapsulate what is heard, observed, experienced, and contemplated within qualitative research data.[9]Following the FGDs, the recordings were compiled, transcribed, and interpreted to align with the study's objectives. The data analysis process was comprehensive. It began with data reduction, a step where the information was streamlined by highlighting key pertinent phrases from the informants' inputs. This process facilitated data categorization, which was pivotal for the subsequent analysis. Next, data display was undertaken, which entailed organizing data in visual forms such as diagrams, tables, or narrative descriptions to make it easily digestible. The culmination of this systematic analysis was drawing conclusions and data verification. Triangulation was used to bolster the validity of the findings from this qualitative research. This technique emphasizes cross-referencing the gathered data through different collection methods to ensure its credibility.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Natural hazards are intrinsic processes that often act as precursors to disasters. These can be categorized into distinct groups. Geophysical hazards are associated with movements of the Earth's interior, such as earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. Hydrological hazards pertain to water dynamics, manifesting as floods, landslides, or tidal waves. Meteorological hazards encompass events like storms, extreme temperature variations, and fog. Climatological hazards, with a growing correlation to climate change, primarily consist of droughts and wildfires. Biological hazards emanate from exposure to living organisms or their toxins, with the recent COVID-19 pandemic being a prominent example. Lastly, extraterrestrial hazards are induced by celestial bodies like asteroids, meteoroids, and comets, especially when they come close to or collide with Earth

(Muhammad Tariq Chaudhary).In the context of the Bandung district, our interviews highlighted recurrent disasters such as floods, tornadoes, landslides, and the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus.[10]

Resilience is not merely an innate quality but can be actively cultivated. Communities, individuals, agencies, and organizations can foster resilience through deliberate decisions and initiatives. Two primary actions are paramount for policies that result in robust post-disaster communities. Firstly, state and local governments should establish apparent disaster risk reduction and management directives. Secondly, governments should actively collaborate with all community stakeholders in the disaster preparedness process. A holistic approach that sets clear recovery objectives for the entire community is instrumental in building resilience. Incorporating these strategies mitigates the immediate impacts of disasters and paves the way for a quicker and more comprehensive recovery. The bedrock of a resilient society is rooted in the knowledge and cognizance of disaster risks. Three core conditions are paramount to achieving tangible disaster risk reduction.[11] Interviews from the Bandung district underscored the proliferation of disaster-preparedness communities. Mr. AA said, "...in our areas, we have numerous disaster preparedness groups. From hall guards to vigilant residents, these efforts are a testament to the people's initiative."

A Disaster Resilient Village embodies a community equipped and primed to confront potential disaster threats and rebound swiftly from any adversities that ensue. In alignment with this vision, many local governments have fortified this principle through various legal instruments, such as Local Regulations (Peraturan Daerah) and the Rule of Law of the regional head (Peraturan Kepala Daerah). Yet, despite these legislative measures, provincial laws have not thoroughly instilled a culture and expertise of disaster awareness in communities. In many countries affected by disasters, the narrative revolves around significant human and material losses. Such losses underscore a reactive mindset prevalent among local governments, where the emphasis is disproportionately on disaster response rather than preemptive preparedness. The quintessential aim of the Disaster Management Act, centered on human rights to protect against natural calamities, is to mitigate disaster risks, particularly in the most vulnerable zones.[12][13]

Active community involvement transcends individual participation, especially in disaster-prone areas. Community engagement during crises galvanizes local resources, skills, and adaptability, ensuring a robust response. It is a societal mechanism empowering communities to mobilize and harness all accessible resources during adversities.[8]

Past disasters underscore the importance of having comprehensive situational awareness for efficacious relief efforts. Given their proximate monitoring capabilities post-disasters, local communities are pivotal in this structural framework. In the Indonesian context, communities are structured into tiers: R.T. comprises 80-100 families; several R.T.s constitute an R.W., which, in turn, groups to form a Desa. Each R.T., R.W., and Desa is led by an individual who interfaces with a coordination unit. The flow of information follows a bottom-up trajectory, reaching the coordination unit.[14] Corroborating this, B.S. remarked, "...information dissemination happens directly to the people or through platforms like WhatsApp."

Disaster risk reduction can be achieved only through a comprehensive approach to connecting and integrating all the actors involved in forecasting, preventing, managing, and mitigating disaster risk and its consequences. Furthermore, disaster risks can be minimized by transferring valid and reliable knowledge on the nature, causes, and effects of such disasters to the relevant institutions and the general public.[15]

4. CONCLUSION

The ability of communities to plan, respond, and recover is tested by several types of catastrophes already having a significant impact on human health. The safety of inhabitants in disaster-prone regions remains the foremost priority for disaster response units. Decentralized disaster management paves the way for region-specific, tailor-made disaster risk reduction strategies that resonate with the unique nuances of each vulnerable region. Every strategic endeavor must pivot on empirical insights derived from the affected areas. Consequently, the transformative lessons harvested from past disasters serve as guideposts for individuals residing in vulnerable zones, arming them with strategies to safeguard their lives and assets during calamities.

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