

Optimizing Social Forestry Programs through the Utilization of Social Capital: A Community Empowerment Approach

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Abstract

This activity aims to provide an understanding of the importance of social aspects, in this case, community social capital, in forest management to optimize the social forestry program. The activity was held on July 15, 2024. The event took place at the Muara Danau Village Hall. A total of 25 participants were invited, consisting of members involved in the social forestry program. The method used was community empowerment through counseling and assistance regarding using social capital to optimize the social forestry program. Based on the pre-test and post-test results, there was a 30% increase in community understanding of using social capital in optimizing the village forestry program. Thus, the improvement in understanding the use of social capital has implications for increasing community participation, which is essential for optimizing the social forestry program and, ultimately, for improving community welfare.

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INTRODUCTION

Muara Danau Village, located in the Semende Darat Laut Subdistrict, is one of the villages that has received a social forestry program in Muara Enim Regency. An area of 264.02 hectares in Muara Danau Village has been designated as a Village Forest based on the Decree of the Governor of South Sumatra No. SK.386/KPTS/DISHUT/2016 concerning the Village Forest Timber Forest Product Utilization Permit (IUPHHK-HD) granted to the Village Forest Management Institution (LPHD) of Muara Danau (<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348970680>).

The Muara Danau Village Forest is located between 4°4'21.7"–4°6'2.1" South Latitude and 103°34'27.1"–103°35'32.0" East Longitude. The Village Forest is one of the social forestry program schemes, through which the government provides opportunities for communities to manage and utilize forest areas to improve their welfare. The government hopes that communities surrounding the forest can benefit from forest resources by managing them cooperatively while also preserving forest sustainability. To ensure that village forests can both promote community welfare and preserve forest ecosystems, a LPHD has been established ([Apriandana et al., 2021](#)).

The duties and functions of the LPHD are to serve as a platform for the community to manage forests responsibly and to preserve forest sustainability. This task is certainly not easy, as it requires balancing economic interests with ecological concerns. Therefore, the utilization of village forests that promote the development of forest-adjacent communities and maintain forest conservation must be actively encouraged to ensure success.

The success of the social forestry program will be more easily achieved if the community leverages existing social resources. One such resource is social capital. Social capital, which includes norms, trust, and networks, can strongly support the success of the social forestry program in Muara Danau Village, Semende Darat Laut Subdistrict, Muara Enim Regency. For this reason, this community service activity was conducted to provide counseling on how to utilize social capital to optimize the village forest-based social forestry program in Muara Danau.

This community service activity follows an integrated service scheme, which combines competitive flagship research with community service activities, and involves both undergraduate (S1) and graduate (S2) students. Through this synergy, there is expected to be a strong link between research outcomes and the contribution of scientific knowledge to the community in Muara Danau Village, particularly through counseling activities on the utilization of social capital for optimizing the social forestry program. The expected output of this activity is a publishable article in a Sinta-indexed journal that meets Technology Readiness Level (TRL) 2, which involves the formulation and application of a specific technology.

Identified problems related to social forestry in Muara Danau Village are as follows: (1) Residents of Muara Danau Village have the opportunity to utilize village forests in accordance with the Decree of the Governor of South Sumatra No. SK.386/KPTS/DISHUT/2016 concerning the IUPHHK-HD granted to LPHD Muara Danau. However, in practice, many aspects are still needed to optimize forest utilization, one of which is the social aspect; (2) The potential for forest sustainability and the economic value of the village forest need to be maintained through the utilization of social capital from the surrounding community, and (3) the local community relatively lacks an understanding of the power of social capital as a means to optimize the utilization of the village forest.

The three identified problems related to social forestry in Muara Danau Village are addressed through the following solutions: (1) Integrating competitive flagship research activities with community service under an integrated scheme, while involving both undergraduate (S1) and graduate (S2) students. Through this integration, it is expected that students will gain added value by applying their knowledge in practice, and the community, particularly those living around the forest, will benefit from increased understanding of how to utilize social capital to optimize the social forestry program. For lecturers, this approach allows them to broaden their knowledge and create a space for dialogue between theory and practice; and (2). Enhancing understanding of the use of social capital to optimize the social forestry program through counseling activities for the communities surrounding the village forest.

The objectives of this community service activity are as follows: (1) To integrate faculty research activities with community service ([Lidya et al., 2022](#)), thereby creating synergy among the three pillars of higher education (Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi) and generating a positive impact on communities surrounding the forest in Muara Danau Village, Semende Darat Laut Subdistrict; (2) To introduce and develop the concept of social capital, particularly the aspects of norms, trust, and networks, which can strongly support the success of the social forestry program in Muara Danau Village, Semende

Darat Laut Subdistrict, Muara Enim Regency; and (3) To optimize the utilization of village forests based on the community's social capital.

The benefits of this community service activity are as follows: (1) Communities surrounding the village forest become familiar with and develop the concept of social capital—namely norms, trust, and networks—which can significantly support the success of the social forestry program in Muara Danau Village, Semende Darat Laut Subdistrict, Muara Enim Regency; and (2) Communities around the forest are able to optimize the use of the village forest based on their social capital.

METHODS

The activity was conducted on Monday, July 15, 2024. The event took place at the Muara Danau Village Hall. A total of 25 participants were invited, consisting of members of the social forestry program. The method used in implementing this integrated community service activity involved empowering the community through counseling and mentoring ([Yunindyawati et al., 2024](#)) on utilizing social capital to optimize the social forestry program. The counseling was conducted using a tutorial method, while mentoring was done through simulations or hands-on practice.

The stages of the activity are as follows: (1) Coordination with the Head of Muara Danau Village regarding permits, activity planning, implementation, and determination of the target audience; (2) Preparation of community service facilities and infrastructure, which includes: creating brochures on the utilization of social capital in optimizing the social forestry program, researching concepts and materials related to social capital utilization and social forestry, preparing examples for simulations or practical exercises on the use of social capital in optimizing the social forestry program; (3) Implementation of the Counseling Activity on the Utilization of Social Capital for Optimizing the Social Forestry Program in Muara Village: involving undergraduate (S1) and graduate (S2) students from Sociology and Environmental Science, the entire community service team, and the target audience; (4) Activity monitoring: Periodic monitoring will be conducted to assess the success of the counseling on social capital utilization in optimizing the social forestry program; (5) Internal evaluation: Evaluation of the activity implementation by the community service team and recommendations from the team; and (6) Reporting: Preparation of the community service activity report and writing a community service article for a Sinta 4-indexed journal.

This activity's target audience is the residents of Muara Danau Village who live around the forest and are involved in social forestry. The number of participants is targeted to be between 25 and 30 people.

The activity's success will be evaluated by conducting pre-tests and post-tests before and after the activity. The test material used to evaluate is related to utilizing social capital in optimizing the social forestry program.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social capital emerges as a social force that can serve as a pillar for the welfare of individuals, communities, and society at large. Several aspects of social capital are commonly recognized, namely values (norms), trust, and networks. In a community, the strength of social capital is reflected in strong interpersonal relationships, easy flow of information, provision of emotional support, and means of cooperation to achieve individual and group goals. Trust is also built within a community, which becomes a key element for collaboration and resource exchange. With trust, a solid social bond is established ([Aulia et al., 2024](#)).

Having high social capital encourages strong community involvement within the surrounding social system. High involvement generates multiple roles within groups and communities, networks, organizations, etc. Communities with high social capital emphasize respect, trust, and networking ([Setiawan, 2024](#)).

Government programs, including social forestry, require a strong foundation of social capital to run smoothly and achieve their objectives ([Pendidikan et al., 2024](#)). This social capital can be an important asset in enhancing social cooperation so that community participation in social forestry programs increases. The village forest in Muara Danau will be able to promote community welfare and ecological sustainability when it involves the synergistic and harmonious potential of human resources and natural resources. By utilizing social capital, it is expected that the village forest management will be conducted responsibly, maintaining forest sustainability and active participation in the program.

Based on this, the integrated community service activity aims to provide counseling on utilizing social capital for the social forestry program in Muara Danau Village. Through this activity, it is expected that science and technology can contribute to the community.

According to the Ministry of Environment and Forestry Regulation No. 9/2021, Social Forestry is a sustainable forest management system carried out by the community within forest areas to improve welfare, environmental balance, and socio-cultural dynamics. There are several community forest management programs (PHBM), including Community Forest (HKm), Village Forest (HD), and partnerships with People's Forest (HR). HKm and HD can be developed in protected forests and production forests that are not burdened by rights and intended for communities dependent on the forest ([Technology, 2019](#)).

This social forestry policy can also be synergized and utilized for forest and land rehabilitation (RHL). According to an analysis by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, the RHL program in a 5-20 year period could produce approximately 2.1 billion m³ of round wood with a tree value equivalent to IDR 2,100 trillion ([Mutaqin et al., 2022](#)). Furthermore, the social forestry program safeguards for poverty alleviation among forest communities and for resolving forest area conflicts (tenurial conflicts). Many communities around forests lack proper legal protection regarding forest resource legality and access. The social forestry policy emerges as part of agrarian reform, a government policy ensuring asset legality and land redistribution known as the TORA policy (Agrarian Reform Object Land), as well as ensuring legal access through the Social Forestry policy ([Murti, 2019](#)).

The 2020-2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) states a development agenda with policy direction and strategies focused on poverty alleviation through agrarian reform and forest area management by communities via social forestry schemes, often called the Agrarian Reform and Social Forestry Program (RAPS) ([Khanifa et al., 2021](#)). Therefore, increasing community roles in forest management is inevitable, as communities are an integral part of the forest ecosystem ([Fitria et al., 2021](#)).

The fundamental concept emphasized in social forestry policy is the requirement for communities seeking management rights to prepare a master plan and be granted legal access to manage the forest areas they live in or around. Communities are deemed capable of playing important roles in forest management ([Yuliana, 2022](#)).

Thus, forest management must consider technical and economic conditions and be carried out with a social approach ([Utara et al., 2024](#)). The contribution and role of forest communities are inseparable from forest area management because communities are crucial components in forest protection and utilization. Communities need to be involved and economically empowered to ensure forest area management participation runs well

and does not damage forest ecosystems ([Farid et al., 2022](#)). Studies show that Social Forestry programs positively impact forest communities and forest sustainability ([Rizaldi et al., 2022](#)). Successful forest management in social forestry programs maintains forest sustainability, contributing to climate change mitigation since forests can absorb carbon and produce oxygen, making the forest's role crucial and needing protection.

Implementing this integrated community service activity involves delivering materials on social capital concepts and counseling on utilizing social capital to optimize social forestry programs. The activity took place on Monday, July 15, 2024, at the Muara Danau Village Hall, Semende Darat Laut District, Muara Enim Regency, South Sumatra Province.

A total of 25 participants, including social forestry members, participated in the activity. The participants listened attentively and actively engaged in discussions. Before the material was delivered, participants were given several questions as a pre-test, and after the activity, a post-test was conducted. The material presented included concepts of social capital aspects such as values (norms), trust, and networks.

Prior to the activity, the community service team coordinated with the village government regarding its implementation. The following is documentation of the meeting with the village government (see Figure 1).



Figure 1 Meeting with the muara danau village officials

In the meeting between the community service team and the village officials, the discussion focused on the schedule of the activity, which was set to take place on Monday, July 15, 2024, starting at 19:00 until completion. The event was held at the Muara Danau Village Hall. The number of invited participants for the activity was 25, consisting of members of the social forestry group.

The activity began with informal greetings between the community service team and all participants, after which the event officially started with the reading of the event agenda by the assigned MC. The first event was the opening, beginning with everyone saying the Basmala. This was followed by the singing of the Indonesian National Anthem (Indonesia Raya), then reciting verses from the Qur'an and a joint prayer.

Next, the village representatives delivered a speech. The Head of Muara Danau Village delivered the speech. In his speech, he expressed gratitude for the visit and the community service activity, stating that they were very beneficial for Muara Danau Village. He hoped that similar activities would continue to further increase knowledge.

The village officials also apologized if the venue provided was less than adequate. Meanwhile, the community service team conveyed that this event was a form of Universitas Sriwijaya's concern for the community, hoping it could benefit Muara Danau Village. Below is the documentation of the material presentation (see Figure 2).



Figure 2 Material presentation

Before the material presentation, a pre-test was conducted to assess the participants' understanding and knowledge about social capital counseling for optimizing the social forestry program. After the pre-test activity was completed, the next session was the presentation of material on: 1) Social capital, 2) Social forestry, and 3) How to optimize the social forestry program. A discussion and question-and-answer session between the community service team and the participants followed this. During the Q&A session, three participants asked questions related to the activity. Below is the documentation of the material presentation:

Before the activity concluded, a post-test was conducted to measure the participants' understanding after receiving the material during this activity. The post-test results will serve as a benchmark for the success of the community service program. A group photo session then followed this. The documentation of the group photo is shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3 Group photo

Based on the pre-test and post-test results to assess community understanding of the concept of social capital in managing social forestry programs, the following diagram can be observed in Figure 4. Before the community service team delivered the material, participants who understood social capital to optimize social forestry programs reached 8%, which is marked in the blue category. Participants who have a sufficient understanding of social capital to optimize social forestry programs reached 40%, which is marked in orange in the diagram above. The rest, 52%, still have a limited understanding of social capital.

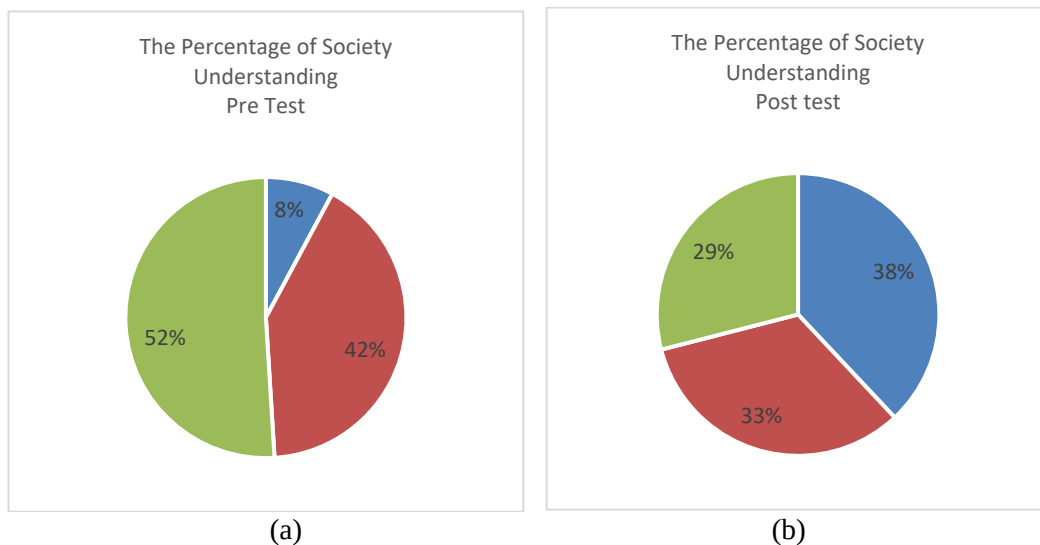


Figure 4 (a) Diagram 1 pre-test result and (b) Diagram post-test result

Before the community service team delivered the material, 8% of participants fully understood social capital for optimizing the social forestry program, indicated by the blue category. Participants who had a moderate understanding of social capital for optimizing the social forestry program reached 40%, shown in orange on the diagram above. The remaining 52% still had a limited understanding of social capital. After the material was delivered, the community service team conducted a post-test with the following results: (1) The percentage of participants who fully understood social capital for optimizing the social forestry program reached 38%, indicating an increase of 30%; (2) The percentage of participants who had a moderate understanding of social capital for optimizing the social forestry program decreased from 40% to 33%, a 7% decline, and (3) The percentage of participants with limited understanding of social capital decreased from 52% to 29%, a 23% reduction. Based on these results, this activity contributed to improving the community's understanding of the important role of social capital in optimizing the management of village forests.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the pre-test and post-test, the community's understanding of the important role of social capital in village forest management increased. Therefore, this activity implies the need to strengthen village institutions in weaving social capital to optimize the outcomes of village forest management.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

The idea of activity, YN and R; draft article preparation, YN, LE, and AW; analysis and writing, M and HN. All authors discussed the result and contributed to this activity.

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