

ABSTRACT

The paradigm of forest area management before the Social Forestry Program existed was state-managed forestry, where communities served primarily as labor in plantation and forestry management. Issues such as illegal logging, forest fires, and extensive settlements were prevalent among rural communities prior to Social Forestry. Consequently, the government endeavored to shift this paradigm through the introduction of the Social Forestry Program. This program aimed to empower rural communities to improve their standard of living. In Sillu Village, Kupang Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, there is one such Forest Farmer Group (KTH), locally known as KTH Paloil Tob, which has existed for some time but is now undergoing development to become effective.

This study was conducted to observe the process and outcomes of empowerment through the Social Forestry Program applied to KTH Paloil Tob. The research employed the ACTORS Empowerment Theory and Participation Theory to examine and analyze the empowerment process and outcomes for KTH Paloil Tob's current development. The study utilized a qualitative descriptive method to clearly depict the empowerment process and outcomes. Data collection methods included observation, documentation, and interviews with twenty-five informants: twenty members of KTH Paloil Tob (comprising five core managers and fifteen members), one informant from the East Nusa Tenggara Provincial Department of Environment and Forestry, one from the Environmental and Forestry Training Center, and three extension officers.

Based on the research findings, it is evident that empowerment for KTH Paloil Tob was achieved through intensive mentoring, support, group protection, and legalization, resulting in improved livelihoods for members and group self-sufficiency. The group demonstrated enhanced capabilities in problem identification and resolution, as well as maximizing their potential. There was increased confidence in the group's ability to manage internal affairs, budgeting, planning, business development, resource management, and production, thereby progressing towards self-reliance. The group developed a sense of responsibility for prudent forest management, leading to reduced forest damage, increased meteorological potential, and higher incomes. Consequently, KTH Paloil Tob has advanced to achieve the status of winawiyata widyakarya, the only group in East Nusa Tenggara to do so. However, challenges remain, such as improving village government participation, drafting local regulations to expedite Social Forestry, enhancing collaboration among stakeholders for funding, guidance, raw materials, and marketing, and maximizing the involvement of youth and women within KTH Paloil Tob.

Key word: Social Forestry, KTH Paloil Tob