

## **Institutional Strengthening of Farmers' Groups in a Joint Empowerment Approach in Lelamase Village, Rasanae Timur District, Bima City**

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### **Article Info**

#### **Article history:**

Received: 26 December 2025

Publish: 7 January 2026

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#### **Keywords:**

*Empowerment;*

*Farmer Institutions;*

*Gapoktan;*

*Agricultural Extension;*

*Farm Management Development.*

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### **Abstract**

*This study aims to analyze the empowerment processes and institutional strengthening of farmer groups (Gapoktan) in Lelamase Village, Rasanae Timur District, Bima City, through education, training, and farm management development programs. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research involved purposively and snowball-selected informants, including Gapoktan leaders, farmer group members, agricultural extension officers, and local government officials. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and document analysis, and were examined using the interactive Miles and Huberman model, with validity ensured through triangulation and member checking. The findings reveal that institutional strengthening through education and training is highly effective, particularly in improving managerial capacities, practical skills, and technical understanding of both group leaders and facilitators. Farm management development also operates optimally, reflected in improved economic scale, commercial orientation, cooperation with rural cooperatives (KUD), partnerships with relevant stakeholders, and enhanced analysis of local resource and market potential, as well as the diversification of supplementary economic activities. Overall, the synergy among extension services, government support, and farmer group initiatives has successfully enhanced institutional capacity, autonomy, professionalism, and the overall welfare of farmers. These results underscore that structured and continuous empowerment strategies significantly contribute to strengthening agricultural institutions at the local level.*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

National development is a requirement for a developing country, and it will be successfully implemented if there is coordination among all its citizens. The essence of national development is the development of the whole person, or individual, and society as a whole.

Recently, farmer groups have been expanded to become combined farmer groups in one administrative area (village), or known as Combined Farmer Groups (Gapoktan). Based on the Decree of the Minister of Agriculture Number 93/Kpts/OT.210/3/1997 concerning guidelines for developing farmer groups, "Combined Farmer Groups" are a combination of several farmer groups that conduct agribusiness based on the principles of togetherness and partnership to achieve increased production and farm income for their members and other farmers. Syahyuti (2007).

Therefore, the Farmers' Group Association (GAPOKTAN) became known as a forum for cooperation between farmer groups. The economic rationale for establishing Gapoktan can be seen as an effort to avoid the high transaction costs that its members must incur due to the issue of competing interests (*Free rider*), different commitments and loyalties, as well as external factors. According to Zakaria in Sudarmanto (2018: 3).

The development of smallholder farmer empowerment is known as an extension program, which began with the establishment of the Ministry of Agriculture. Karsidi (2012). This shows that agricultural empowerment efforts in Indonesia have been carried out for a long time. However, the results of this empowerment have not been optimal, as evidenced by the fact that Indonesian agriculture is still unable to compete with foreign agricultural products. The concept of empowering farming communities fundamentally means placing farming communities and their institutions as the basic force for economic, social, and cultural development. Reviving various community economic institutions to be collected and strengthened so that they can act as locomotives for economic progress is a must. The people's economy will be built if the synergistic relationship of various social and economic institutions within the community is developed towards the formation of a people's economic network. The direction of empowerment for farming communities needs to be carried out with the importance of agribusiness, namely developing agriculture and agro-industry or industries that process agricultural products and services that support them.

One way to improve farmer competitiveness is through the development of agricultural institutions, empowerment, strengthening, and capacity building of small farmer groups (Kartasasmita, 1997: 31-32). Institutional strengthening at the farmer level, including farmer groups, associations, and cooperatives, is something that needs to be developed dynamically and immediately to improve farmers' professionalism and bargaining power.

Agricultural institutions are norms or customs that are structured and patterned and practiced continuously to meet the needs of community members who are closely related to the livelihood of the agricultural sector in rural areas. There are eight types of institutions in the agricultural system, namely: 1) input provider institutions, 2) capital provider institutions, 3) labor provider institutions, 4) land and water provider institutions, 5) farming business institutions, 6) agricultural product processing institutions, 7) marketing institutions, and 8) information provider institutions.

According to Dimyati (2007:43), the problems that persist with the figure of farmers and farmer institutions in Indonesia are: (1) Farmers' lack of insight and knowledge regarding production management and marketing network issues; (2) Farmers' lack of full involvement in agribusiness activities. Farmers' activities are still focused on production activities (*on farm*). And (3), the role and function of farmer institutions as a forum for farmer organizations have not been running optimally.

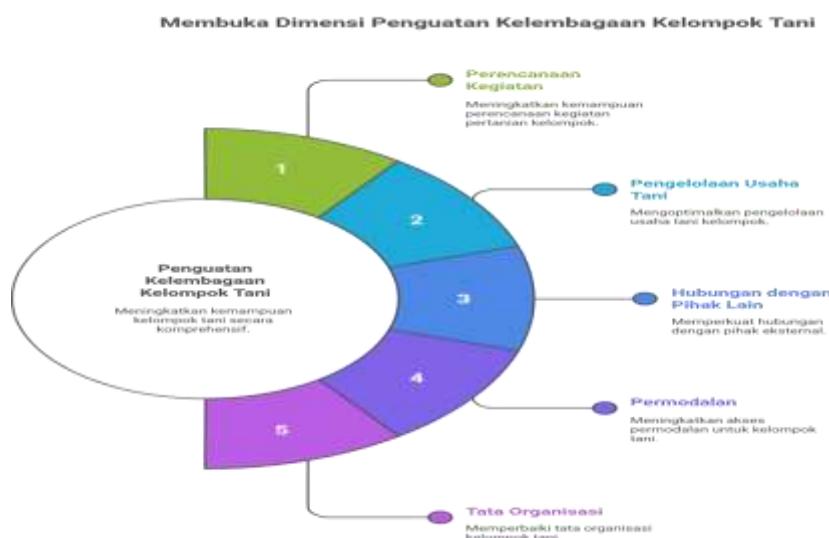
To overcome the above problems, it is necessary to make efforts to develop, empower, and strengthen farmer institutions (such as farmer groups, labor institutions, input provider institutions, institutions of output, extension institutions, and capital institutions) and is expected to protect farmers' bargaining position. Protective measures that support farmers, both as producers and as beneficiaries of the fruits of their labor, are primarily realized through a fair and profitable output price level for farmers.

Community groups (such as farmer groups) are a form of organization that grows within communities or farming families to meet and manage their farming needs. In developing these groups within a community, many efforts can be made to make them

independent organizations and even serve as learning resources for other farmer groups or communities.

Our efforts aim to improve these groups' capabilities, both in terms of activity planning, farm management, relationships with other parties, capital, and organizational structure. Therefore, community group strengthening can be understood as an effort to adapt and develop (farmer) group organizations so they can play a more effective, optimal, and efficient role. In other words, group strengthening is an effort to develop (farmer) groups so they can become self-sufficient organizations.

There are several considerations so that the agricultural sub-sector, especially agriculture in Lelamase Subdistrict, Bima City, is made one of the priorities in its guidance and development, including: first, Lelamase Subdistrict, Bima City has large enough natural resources for agricultural development; second, Lelamase Subdistrict, Bima City with its natural conditions is very suitable for agricultural development; third, the facilities and infrastructure for agricultural development in Lelamase Subdistrict, Bima City are very helpful in facilitating the implementation of services, institutions, and guidance in increasing efficiency; fourth, it will make Lelamase Subdistrict a superior agricultural producer in Bima City.



To support opportunities and to overcome a number of problems as stated above, a policy strategy is needed, including empowering farmer group institutions.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

### 1. Types and Approaches of Research

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study. This approach was chosen because this research seeks to deeply understand the social realities, institutional dynamics, and empowerment processes occurring within farmer groups (Gapoktan) in Lelamase Village, Rasanae Timur District, Bima City. The case study is used to comprehensively describe the actual conditions, potential, constraints, and empowerment strategies of agricultural institutions in the region.

### 2. Location and Time of Research

The research was conducted in Lelamase Village, Rasanae Timur District, Bima City, which was purposively selected due to its high agricultural potential, supportive natural resources, and the presence of a farmer group (Gapoktan), which is the focus of institutional strengthening. The research period, from initial observation and data

collection to data verification, spanned two months (October-November) determined by the researcher.

### 3. Research Informants

Research informants were determined using purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques. Key informants included:

- a. Gapoktan/farmer group administrators
- b. Members of the farmer group
- c. Field agricultural extension workers (PPL)
- d. Lelamase Village Officials

#### 4. Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was carried out using the following techniques:

- a. In-depth interviews were conducted to gather information regarding the role of Gapoktan, organizational dynamics, empowerment processes, institutional constraints, and strategies for strengthening farmers' bargaining position.
- b. Direct observation. Researchers conducted observations of farmer group activities, meeting processes, farming activities, and interactions between members and related institutions.
- c. Documentation: Collecting documents such as the Gapoktan organizational structure, activity reports, member data, activity photos, and policy archives related to farmer empowerment.

## 5. Data Analysis Techniques

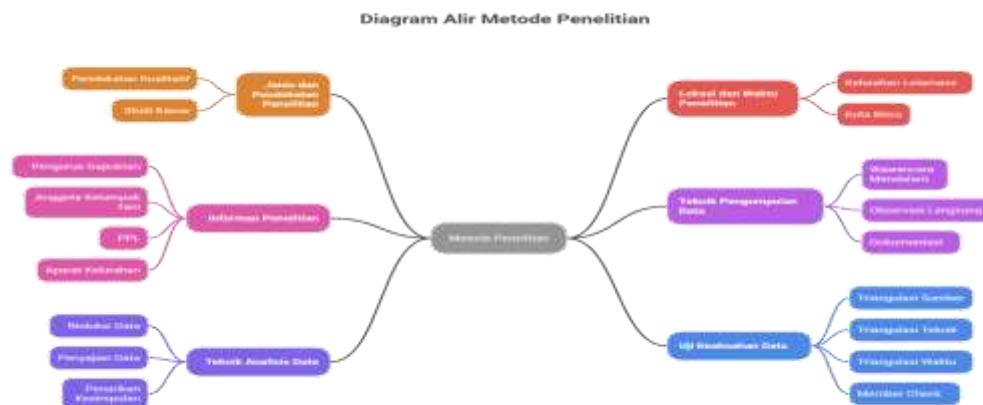
Data analysis was carried out interactively, referring to the Miles & Huberman model, which includes:

- a. Data Reduction: Sorting, focusing, and simplifying data from interviews, observations, and documentation related to Gapoktan empowerment and institutions.
- b. Data Presentation: Presenting data in narrative, table, or chart form to describe institutional conditions, constraints, and empowerment processes.
- c. Drawing Conclusions/Verification: Drawing conclusions based on patterns, themes, and relationships between data, then verifying through triangulation.

## 6. Data Validity Test

Data validity is tested using:

- a. Source triangulation (comparison of information from Gapoktan administrators, members, PPL, and sub-district government)
- b. Triangulation techniques (interviews, observation, documentation)
- c. Time triangulation. In addition, researchers also used the member check technique, namely reconfirming the interview results and findings with informants to ensure the accuracy of the data.



### 3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### A. Strengthening Farmer Group Institutions through Education and Training for Managers and Supervisors

Strengthening of farmer group institutions is carried out through four activity indicators, namely: (1) Education and training of managers, (2) Internships, (3) Socialization/extension, and (4) Education and training of supervisors.

##### 1. Management Education and Training

An interview with the head of the Oi Rau Farmers Group (Sukrin Seno) revealed that management education and training are crucial for improving the group's ability to manage agricultural businesses. The government regularly provides training and seminars for farmer group members. This is reinforced by Abdullah, a member of the group, who explained that the training has been instrumental in the group's development.

##### 2. Apprenticeship

According to Efriantin (PPL), internships are provided to farmer group leaders to gain practical experience in developing agricultural businesses. Another informant, Muhtar, emphasized that internships are very helpful in providing members with hands-on experience in increasing agricultural yields.

##### 3. Socialization/Counselling

Efriantin explained that routine extension services are provided to provide information on farming techniques and group development. This information is also needed to solve production problems. Hasan, a member of the farmer group, similarly stated that extension services are provided directly by agricultural extension workers.

##### 4. Education and Training of Mentors

Julkarnain from the Lelamase Village LPM emphasized the need for education for farmer group leaders to provide optimal guidance. Another farmer group leader, Umar, also acknowledged that this initiative was carried out by the government and had a positive impact.

Conclusion: The four indicators (manager education-training, internships, socialization, and mentor education) all ran well and were considered very useful by informants.

#### B. Institutional Strengthening through Farming Business Development

Farming business development is carried out through seven indicators, namely: (1) Increasing farmer businesses to achieve economic scale, (2) Managing businesses commercially, (3) Institutionalizing with KUD, (4) Partnering with related entrepreneurs/agencies, (5) Seeing regional potential, (6) Seeing market potential, and (7) Carrying out additional economic activities.

##### 1. Improving Farmers' Businesses to Achieve Economies of Scale

PPL Efriantin explained that extension services are provided to address farmer challenges such as seeds, land, fertilizer, and pesticides. Hamdin, a member of the farmer group, stated that extension workers are always striving to improve farmer businesses towards better economies of scale.

##### 2. Managing a Business Commercially

PPL Erwin stated that extension workers encourage farmers to become active users of information and take advantage of business opportunities. A. Rajak emphasized that guidance from extension workers facilitates the marketing of agricultural products.

##### 3. Institutionalized with KUD

Efriantin explained that the Cooperatives (KUD) facilitate access to capital and marketing for farmers. Sukardin, the head of the farmer group, said that collaboration with the KUD significantly assists the group's operations.

#### 4. Partnering with Entrepreneurs/Related Agencies

Mahmud and Ahmad stated that partnering with entrepreneurs facilitates marketing and increases profits. Extension workers also encourage groups to collaborate.

#### 5. Seeing the Potential of the Region

Extension workers determine commodities based on regional conditions. The head of the Dana Nae Farmers Group stated that commodity selection is based on regional potential to maximize yields.

#### 6. Seeing Market Potential

PPL Efriantin explained the importance of market analysis in determining profitable commodities. Damra added that this approach improves farmer welfare.

#### 7. Carrying out Additional Economic Activities

Erwin (PPL) stated that farmers are encouraged to pursue additional non-agricultural businesses. Group members (Abidin) also engage in trading activities to supplement their income.

Conclusion: The seven indicators of agricultural business development are running very well, and all informants stated that this activity is very beneficial.

### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research and discussion regarding strengthening farmer group institutions through education, training, and agricultural business development, it can be concluded that:

Institutional strengthening through education and training has been very effective. All informants assessed that the four indicators of manager education and training, internships, outreach/extension, and mentor education and training had been implemented effectively. These programs were able to improve the capacity of managers, broaden practical experience, provide technical understanding, and strengthen the mentors' abilities to assist farmer groups.

Farming business development also demonstrated very positive results. Seven development indicators, including increasing economies of scale, commercial business management, institutionalization with the Cooperatives and Village Unit Cooperatives (KUD), partnerships with relevant parties, identification of regional and market potential, and additional economic activities, were all implemented optimally, and the benefits were felt by the farmer groups. This development not only streamlined production and marketing processes but also increased farmers' incomes and welfare.

Synergy between extension workers, government, supervisors, and farmer groups has proven to be instrumental in strengthening institutions. Regular mentoring, access to information, institutional assistance, and opportunities for collaboration have made farmer groups more independent, productive, and adaptive to business opportunities. Overall, institutional strengthening of farmer groups in the research area has been very successful and has had a significant impact on improving farmer capacity, performance, and welfare.

### 5. SUGGESTION

1. The Bima City Regional Government and Agriculture Service need to expand and increase the frequency of training, internships, and extension services so that all farmer groups have equal opportunities to increase their capacity.

2. Field Agricultural Extension Workers (PPL) in Lelamase Village need to increase intensive assistance to farmer groups, especially in the use of agricultural technology, business management, and mapping market potential.
3. Farmer groups are advised to be more active in participating in training, internships, and extension services, as well as implementing the knowledge gained in daily farming business management.
4. Agricultural Institutional Supervisors and Administrators need to improve their capacity through ongoing training to provide increasingly effective guidance.

## 6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

1. The Research Team would like to thank the Chairperson of the Mbojo Education Development Foundation, the Chancellor of Mbojo University, Bima, and the Head of LPPM, Mbojo University, Bima, for funding this activity.
2. We would like to express our gratitude to the Regional Government and the Bima City Agriculture Service, who have provided permits, data, and facilities to support the smooth running of the research.
3. We would like to thank the Field Agricultural Extension Workers (PPL) in Lelamase Village, especially the extension workers who have taken the time to provide information and assisted the author in obtaining data in the field.
4. We would like to thank the Chairman and Members of the Farmers' Group in Lelamase Village, who were willing to be informants and provided many valuable inputs for the completion of this research.
5. We would like to express our gratitude to the supervisors and administrators of agricultural institutions, who helped provide explanations, support, and information regarding the process of strengthening farmer groups.

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