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Roles of Neighborhood Group to Promote Participatory Development in Indonesia: Case of Three Villages in Purbalingga District, Central Java Province

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ABSTRACT

Neighborhood Group (Rukun Tetangga/RT), an association of fifties households living in the same areas, is expected to promote participatory development in Indonesian decentralization. This study aims to analyze whether it could promote participatory development. To do so, a case study was conducted in three villages, namely Kedarpan, Serang and Sumilir, in Purbalingga district of Central Java province. Totally 240 household heads in 24RTs were randomly selected to be the respondents. Data were analyzed through qualitative and quantitative techniques. Three main findings emerge from this study. Firstly, community involvement was pseudo participation emphasizing more on resource mobilization but less in generating idea and controlling the government. Secondly, capacity of RT heads was good enough in term of informativeness, encouragement, fairness, creativity, responsiveness and submission to consensus, but slightly poor in term of accountability. Thirdly, RT was not able to empower community, so community understanding to decentralization terms, development programs and village governance was generally poor. Although some potentialities were found, it can be generally concluded that RT is not completely successful in promoting participatory development. Complexities of institutional problems, which include weak capacity, trouble in technical regulations and lack of support from government, are among the factors hampering RT to play its role. Thus, hand in hand with capacity development of RT head, the government is supposed to establish regulations supporting the empowerment of RT, and involving other rural institutions to help

performing the roles that still cannot be played by RT.

KEYWORDS: Neighborhood Group, Participatory Development, Decentralization

INTRODUCTION

After the collapse of Suharto regime, Indonesia rapidly moved from centralized to decentralized country. In 2001, the government transferred power, tasks and budget for rural development to village government. This moment made a fundamental shift in rural development, from top-down to bottom-up approach. It aimed to facilitate community participation, improve local capacity and empower community.

While decentralization increased the power of village government, rural institutions could not be regarded as dynamic part of decentralization. Despite the introduction of village parliament, most of the other institutions were not changed much in term of structure and pattern of relationship (Sutiyo & Maharjan, 2014). Thus, there are many concerns on whether decentralization could be effectively implemented through this rural institution setting.

In the initial years of decentralization, several studies find that there had been some positive changes toward more participatory rural development in Indonesia. Alatas, Pritchett, and Wetterberg (2005) find that decentralization improved community membership in rural institutions, especially in groups providing services of health, education, finance and general neighborhood assistance. Another

study conducted by Antlöv (2003) also finds that decentralization improved community participation in rural development, especially by providing space for dialogue in development planning and establishing a mechanism of accountability.

Antlöv (2003), Alatas et al. (2005) and many other studies have presented that the policy of decentralization launched in 2001 has been a starting point in creating a more participatory and democratic local government. However, no one can guarantee that decentralization will be successful in achieving its objectives. To be successful, decentralization always needs an active government and civil society engagement that will ensure that the regulations are not distorted during implementation and that communities are continuously involved in development processes (Antlöv, 2003).

Currently, after about fourteen years of decentralization, little is known about the implementation of decentralization in grassroots level. Whether positive changes in the initial years of decentralization are still continued and institutionalized in village governance is still a big question. In-depth analysis of interaction between community, institution and government is therefore needed to understand what really happened. While the other studies analyze village governance as a unity of many kinds of rural institutions, this study tries to focus on one institution, namely Neighborhood Groups (*Rukun Tetangga/RT*). Whether this institution could promote participatory rural development is the central question in this study.

Analyzing roles of an institution in participatory development requires attention to specific processes, which include the ways in which community is involved in rural development, the leadership

capacity of institution heads, and the impact of those processes on community empowerment. Thus, the rest of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 will provide literature reviews; Section 3 will present research method and data set; Section 4 will present findings consisting of description of research location, community participation, leadership capacity and community empowerment within RT; Section 5 will develop discussion; Section 6 will draw conclusion and policy implication.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Neighborhood Group (*Rukun Tetangga/RT*) is an association of fifty to hundred households living in the same area. The head is elected by community, and all households are automatically the member. In the structure of village government, RT provides a connecting line between village government and households.

RT was established by Japanese army in Java during World War II. It was originated from an institution named *Tonarigumi*, literally means Neighborhood Association, in Japanese societies. Initially, RT tasks were to control people, prevent espionage, foster villager's self-help and mobilize logistic for army in order to win the war (Kobayashi, 2007). RT got high enthusiastic from Javanese people since it was propagandized to promote community mutual aids (*gotong-royong*), which was a tradition in Javanese rural areas. From various sources, Kobayashi calculates that just within one and a half year since the decree of establishment, there had been about 500,000 RTs in Java. Simply speaking, RT was the greatest penetration in Indonesian society among all measures introduced by Japanese military government.

Although the war was ended in 1945, the structure of RT continued to exist. Even, through Regulation of Ministry of Home Affairs 7/1983¹, the government of Indonesia made it a mandatory organization throughout Indonesian areas. Virtually established in all areas of Indonesia, RT then became one of the most effective state initiated groups reaching community.

It should be noted that the position of RT is ambiguous. The regulation stipulates that it is a community organization to provide neighborhood assistance to villagers. Yet, RT was also given bulky governmental tasks and became the lowest state institutions reaching households. Thus, RT plays dual roles, either as a community organization or as a pseudo governmental institution. As community organization, RT manages daily affairs of community, which include collecting garbage, promoting peace, conducting night patrol, holding marriage, funerals and religious ceremonies, cleaning roads and other infrastructures (Dwianto, 2003; Grootaert, 1999). As a pseudo administrative institution, it has tasks to collect property taxes and dues, update demographic data, socialize government programs and connect the communication between villagers and village government (Antlöv, 2000).

During Suharto administration, although it was propagandized that public participation was encouraged in rural development, numerous studies present that what really happening was a bureaucratization of village government. Study by Antlöv (1995) in one village of West Java province finds that given the nature of authoritarian regime at that time, virtually all rural institutions, including RT, were made as client of the state. Power was monopolized by village elites focusing on relations

with central power holders at the expense of community. Participatory processes in RT were just a formality, and RT heads just became a tool of the state to collect taxes and to mobilize cash and labour contributions. Similarly, another study conducted by Warren (1990) in several villages in Bali province also finds that rural institutions, including RT, played passive roles in rural development due to intervention from government agencies.

While many studies find that RT plays only passive roles in executing participatory development during Suharto administration, several studies find that RT can help villagers in addressing their livelihood problems. For example, study by Grootaert (1999) in 48 villages of six districts finds that community perceived RT as one of the most important rural institutions to help their livelihood problems. Most RTs had monthly meeting to discuss local issues like road maintenance, infrastructure reparation, religious ceremonies and local festive. In the same location, Evers (2000) finds that with regard to participatory development, community initiatives and collective actions were focused within RT. This was because community had no formal instrument to influence village government, and trust between villagers and their formal leaders was low.

After decentralization was launched, the government perceived RT as one of potential organizations to execute decentralization in village level. Several regulations clearly mention that RT should be involved in the whole of rural development processes². Various tasks were mandated to RT, like becoming the first place to conduct villagers meeting, generating development proposals, mobilizing local resources, socializing government programs,

sharing village government accountability report, and more importantly, empowering community and increasing their democratic skill.

Either study by Grootaert (1999), Evers (2000), Antlöv (2003) or Sutiyo and Maharjan (2014) present the importance of RT in promoting participatory development within decentralization context. As the lowest administration level, RT is deemed to have strong roots within community and can organize villagers better than the other institutions. Just like the other rural institutions, the effectiveness of RT in promoting participatory development will hypothetically depend on government commitment to support and always involve this institution in the whole development process (Antlöv, 2003), and whether RT itself can manage internal conflicts, eliminate domination of certain people and continuously improve its capacity through learning process (Uphoff & Buck, 2006).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study is a kind of case study at village level. Three villages were purposively selected to be the study sites, namely Kedarpan, Serang and Sumilir villages in Purbalingga District, Central Java Province. Data were collected by interviews, questionnaires, observations and documentary study, during June to July 2014. This study purposively selected 8 RTs in each village, and 10 households from each RT were randomly selected. Total respondents were 240 households.

Data were collected through observation, interview and questionnaires, and are analyzed through both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Test of questionnaire validity was conducted through item analysis by using Pearson Product-Moment correlation, and reliability test

was conducted through Cronbach Alpha test. Only the questions that pass the tests are utilized in the subsequent calculation. Respondent's perception is arranged in *Likert* scale ranging from poor (score 1), slightly poor (score 2), good enough (score 3) and good (score 4). Further, respondent's answer is summed, and a mean is created by dividing total score by total respondents. The interpretation of the mean is: Score 1-1.74: poor; Score 1.75-2.49: slightly poor; Score 2.5-3.24: good enough; Score 3.25-4: good.

To measure the capacity of RT heads, this study uses indicators of community leadership capacity developed by Sutiyo and Maharjan (2014). The indicators were derived from combination of leadership concept and traditional roles of leader in Javanese society. The indicators include informativeness, encouragement, accountability, fairness, creativity, responsiveness and submission to consensus.

With regard to community empowerment, this study emphasizes empowerment as a process to improve villager's skill to participate in the decentralization context. Community skills in decentralization are measured through several proxies, which are the understanding on terms of decentralization, understanding on some major government programs implemented in the study sites, and understanding on some village institutions.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

DESCRIPTION OF STUDY VILLAGES AND RESPONDENTS

The villages of Kedarpan, Serang and Sumilir covered an area of 13.09 km², 2.25 km² and 2.26 km², respectively. Number of RTs was 11 groups in Kedarpan, 33 groups in Serang and 9 groups in Sumilir. By 2014, there were 598 households living

TABLE I: SOCIO ECONOMIC CONDITION OF RESPONDENTS

No	Profile	Village			Total
		Kedarpan	Serang	Sumilir	
1	Sex				
	■ Male	75 (94)	77 (96)	67 (84)	219 (91)
	■ Female	5 (6)	3 (4)	13 (16)	21 (9)
2	Age				
	■ <30 years	1 (1)	2 (3)	1 (1)	4 (2)
	■ 30-39 years	12 (15)	11 (14)	3 (4)	26 (11)
	■ 40-49 years	29 (36)	28 (35)	30 (38)	87 (36)
	■ 50-59 years	28 (35)	31 (39)	27 (34)	86 (36)
	■ ≥ 60 years	10 (13)	8 (10)	19 (24)	37 (15)
3	Education				
	■ None	14 (18)	14 (18)	19 (24)	47 (20)
	■ Primary	43 (54)	51 (64)	47 (59)	141 (59)
	■ Low secondary	11 (14)	10 (13)	10 (13)	31 (13)
	■ High secondary	10 (13)	2 (3)	4 (5)	16 (7)
	■ University	2 (3)	3 (4)	0	5 (2)
4	Occupation				
	■ Agriculture	45 (57)	61 (76)	61 (77)	167 (70)
	■ Business	10 (13)	7 (9)	6 (8)	23 (10)
	■ Labour	16 (20)	6 (8)	10 (13)	32 (13)
	■ Salaried job	9 (11)	6 (8)	3 (4)	18 (8)

Source: Field survey, 2014.

Note: Number in parenthesis indicates a percentage

in Kedarpan, 1,256 households living in Serang, and 564 households living in Sumilir.

Among 240 respondents selected by this study, majority of them were male (91%), aged between 40 and 49 years (36%) and graduated from primary level (59%). Most respondents worked in agriculture (59%), with landholding mostly less than 0.5 ha (Table 1).

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN RT

Having tasks to promote participatory development, it was important for RT to have a periodic meeting with the member. It was found that 17 RTs had periodic meeting, mostly monthly. Further, in 2 RTs in Serang and 3 RTs in Sumilir, the meeting

was not held periodically but as per need. In Kedarpan, 2 RTs never arranged meeting for years.

However, real participation is not simply carrying meetings, but also attendance and quality of discussion. With regard to community attendance in RT meeting, it was found that most respondents (59%) often or always came to attend the meeting (Table 2). This means that community attendance was quite good. However, most respondents never generated idea during the meeting. Thus, the meeting basically had no dynamic discussion. Most respondents had limited involvement in decision making, and came to the meeting just to listen the information delivered by RT heads and village apparatus.

TABLE 2: COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN RT

No	Indicators	Kedarpas	Serang	Sumilir	Total	P Value
1	Attending the meeting					0.753
	• Never	4 (5)	4 (5)	2 (3)	10 (4)	
	• Rarely	25 (31)	29 (36)	35 (44)	89 (37)	
	• Often	28 (35)	28 (35)	25 (31)	81 (34)	
	• Always	23 (29)	19 (24)	18 (23)	60 (25)	
2	Generating idea during the meeting					0.946
	• Never	33 (41)	33 (41)	33 (41)	99 (41)	
	• Sometimes	27 (34)	23 (29)	26 (33)	76 (32)	
	• Often	20 (25)	24 (30)	21 (26)	65 (27)	
3	Average days of labour contribution	25	22	19	22	
4	Average days of paid labour	3	3	3	3	
5	Average amount of cash and material contribution (IDR)	66,250	139,400	241,900	149,200	
6	Frequency of RT meeting compared to ten years ago					0.305
	• Decrease	2 (3)	2 (3)	0 (0)	4 (2)	
	• Same	43 (54)	38 (48)	50 (63)	131 (55)	
	• Increase	35 (44)	39 (49)	30 (38)	104 (43)	
7	Labor contribution compared to ten years ago					0.042**
	• Decrease	1 (1)	1 (1)	2 (3)	4 (2)	
	• Same	45 (56)	35 (44)	54 (68)	134 (56)	
	• Increase	34 (43)	43 (54)	24 (30)	101 (42)	
8	Cash contribution compared to ten years ago					0.101
	• Decrease	0	3 (4)	0	3 (1)	
	• Same	44(55)	40(50)	50(63)	134(56)	
	• Increase	36(45)	35(44)	30(38)	101(42)	
9	Material contribution compared to ten years ago					0.285
	• Decrease	0	2(3)	0	2(1)	
	• Same	46(58)	42(53)	50(63)	138(58)	
	• Increase	34(43)	34(43)	30(38)	98(41)	

Source: Field survey, 2014.

Note: Number in parenthesis indicates a percentage; Chi Square technique was applied, and ***, **, * mean significant at 1%, 5%, and 10%, respectively

It should be noted that for most villagers, the meeting in RT was the only meeting that they could join. Meeting at village level usually only invited the heads of RT, village parliament and some other rural institutions. Decree of Purbalingga District Head 14/2010³, which was the main technical regulations related to village development planning, stipulated that it was procedurally enough to conduct village planning meeting just by involving village apparatus, head of village parliament (BPD), head of village development committee (LKMD), heads of RTs and some community prominent figures.

Although community came to the meeting just as listener and was not deeply involved in decision making, resources mobilization was surprisingly high. Coercive methods from RT heads were not found. This means that community voluntarily contributed to projects. Social pressure, in which a villager was fearful of being criticized by neighbors if he did not contribute, was part of the motivating

factor why resource mobilization was high.

Days of labour contribution in government project and self-initiated infrastructure maintenance were averagely 22 days per year, with no significant difference across the study villages (Table 2). Most activities had been routinely scheduled, for example once a month to maintain the road, once in six month to maintain irrigation channel, once a year to maintain cemetery, public well and mosque. Cash and material contribution was averagely IDR 149,183 a year, with the highest rate in Sumilir. This amount was equivalent to the wage of 4 days-labour in cropland.

Most respondent perceived that frequency of RT meeting and labour and cash contribution were the same as ten years before. However, substantial number of respondents perceived that the indicators were increased. This means that the change to be more participatory community organization was happening in RT.

3. CAPACITY OF RT HEADS

To understand the capacity of RT heads, it was important to consider that becoming RT heads was a voluntary job receiving no incentives. Some villagers were appointed to become RT heads simply because no one was willing to hold this job. Most RT heads had education in primary level and occupation as farmer.

It was found that informativeness, submission to consensus, responsiveness, encouragement, creativity and fairness were good enough. Yet, accountability was slightly poor (Figure 1).

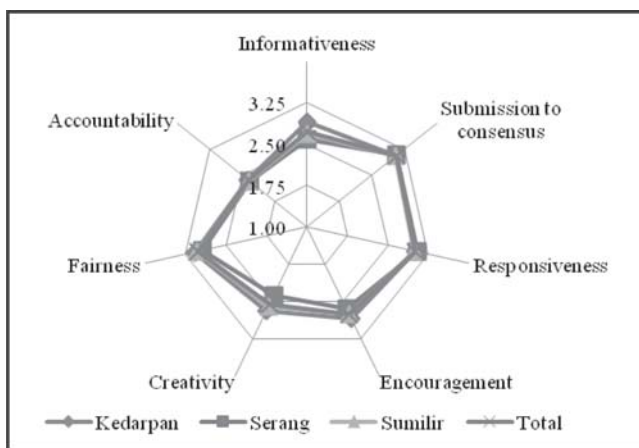


FIG. 1: RESPONDENT'S PERCEPTION ON CAPACITY OF RT HEAD

Source: Field survey, 2014

Note: Score 1-1.74: poor; 1.75-2.49: slightly poor; 2.5-3.24: good enough; 3.25-4: good

Most respondents perceived that RT heads were informative enough, in which they informed and socialized government programs to the villagers in RT meeting. Any decisions made during the meeting were mostly followed by the RT head, thus most respondents perceived that the indicator of submission to consensus was good enough.

RT was the closest institution with community, thus it confronted day-to-day community problems, complaints and other affairs. Most respondents perceived that RT heads were responsive enough

to those problems. During project implementation, they motivated and encouraged villagers to voluntarily contribute labor. However, many respondents perceived that their creativity was a little bit low. The way to solve problems was without innovation. This is why the score of creativity was slightly low. Relatively low score of creativity might be related to the education of RT heads which was mostly primary level. Further, most respondents perceived that RT heads were fair enough, in which they treated every villager without discrimination.

With regard to accountability, many respondents perceived that they were rarely given report of village budget. Many said that information about development projects were given just before the projects was started, especially related to the name of programs and what villagers should do in the implementation. However, after the projects were finished, very limited information about budget utilization was shared to community.

There was indication that their low score in accountability was a result of the same low-accountability from the higher administrative level. Village responsibility meeting, which was supposed to be a meeting where village head reported the fund utilization, was not always conducted. Many RT heads said that they were given neither information of village budget nor other project from village head, thus nothing could they share to the community. Report of fund utilization was only printed for the district government.

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT THROUGH RT

Given tasks to promote participatory development, RT was still not able to improve community understanding to decentralization. The under-

standing on terms of decentralization (*Otonomi Daerah*), which was broadly quoted in Indonesia, and participatory budgeting (*Musrenbang*), which was annually held, was slightly low. Most respondents just ever heard the terms, but did not understand the meaning (Figure 2).

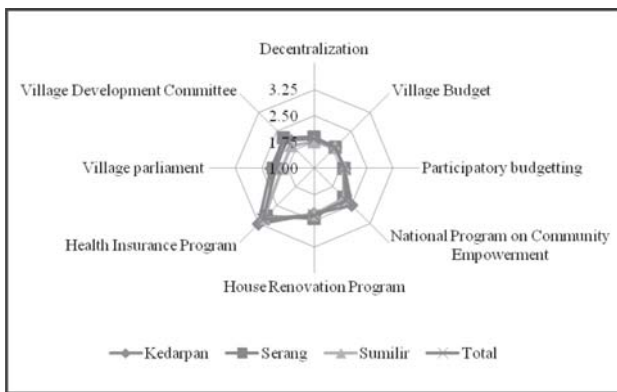


FIG. 2: RESPONDENT'S UNDERSTANDING ON DECENTRALIZATION MATTERS

Source: Field survey, 2014

Note: Score 1-1.74: poor; 1.75-2.49: slightly poor; 2.5-3.24: good enough; 3.25-4: good

The understanding on some major development programs, like National Program for Community Empowerment (*Program Nasional Pemberdayaan Masyarakat*) and House Renovation Program (*Program Pemugaran Rumah Miskin*), Village Budget (*Alokasi Dana Desa*) were slightly low. Whereas, the three programs were implemented in their village annually. Most respondents just ever heard the program, but did not know the meaning, program recipients, amount of fund and its utilization. Further, understanding on Health Insurance Program (*Askeskin*) was good enough because many respondents became the recipients (Figure 2).

The understanding on matters related to village government, like Village Parliament (*Badan*

Permasyarakatan Desa/BPD) and Village Development Committee (*Lembaga Ketahanan Masyarakat Desa/LKMD*) were low. Most respondent did not know the members of these institutions and their tasks (Figure 2).

Low community understanding on decentralization indicates that the process of developing community capacity through RT was not completely successful. In the other words, community empowerment was not effectively channelized through RT. Some trainings were conducted by district government, but only for village head and apparatus. Although some capacity existed in RT heads, it was not a result of capacity development from district government but a learning by doing process.

Related to participation in RT, it can be said the quality of community involvement is pseudo participation emphasizing more on resource mobilization but less in decision making. Although periodic meeting exists in most RTs, the essence of participation is not real.

Community perceived leadership capacity of RT heads as good enough, mostly with high scores in indicators related to traditional leaders and low scores to indicators related to accountability and creativity. Although it is still far from being clear, this phenomenon indicates that RT heads are not able to transform themselves to practice the principle of modern organization.

Considering the pseudo participation of community and inability of RT heads to practice accountability, it is not surprising that community understanding on decentralization is still low. Community does not experience an upgrade of capacity on issues related to decentralization and development programs in their village. On the other words,

community may be not aware about the change happening in the decentralization system.

Findings of this study are contrary to Grootaert (1999) and Evers (2000). While they find that RT, as community organization, could manage common livelihoods problems of community, this study finds that as pseudo administrative units, RT is not completely successful. This institution is not able to facilitate broad participation, accountability and capacity development for community, or to be the institution where villagers learn democratic skills in decentralization.

However, this does not happen only on the community as the target of empowerment, but also in the RT heads as the community leaders. As findings of this study presents, indicators in term of creativity and accountability were low. This means that capacity development to them was also low. Thus, what really happening is that the role of RT may depend on the capacity development to its head.

Yet, some potentialities are identified. For example, most RTs hold scheduled meetings, and substantial number of respondent perceived that participation is increased in the last ten years. Further, in most indicators of leadership capacity, RT heads have performed their role as a good enough community leader. Thus, what the government should do is to optimize the potentialities of RT.

Looking at the current conditions of RT, there are two options can be done for improving the success of decentralization. The first is to develop the capacity of RT head, so that they can practice accountability, improve creativity and transfer their knowledge on decentralization to community. As far as capacity development was delivered to them,

and accountability is shared to them, it will be very probably that they will share to community.

The second, hand in hand with capacity development to RT heads, the government should not limit the bottom-up proposal and participatory development only through RT. The other institutions in rural areas should be involved to help playing the roles that cannot be played by RT.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

It can be generally concluded that RT is not completely successful in promoting participatory rural development. Community participation does not substantively happen in RT, and there are leadership problems implying to the weak institutional capacity of RT. As an impact, community empowerment is not optimally channelized through RT. As this study presents, complexities of institutional problems, which range from weak capacity, trouble in technical regulation and lack of support from government, are among the factors hampering RT to perform its roles. What happening in RT indicates that the participatory development is still far from being institutionalized in Indonesian decentralization.

Government commitment to always involve RT and community in the development process is needed. Empowerment to RT heads should be delivered so that they can perform participatory meeting and deliver empowerment to the community. Hand in hand with these, the government should revise the technical regulation in rural development so that community participation is not limited in RT level. The regulation should guarantee more seats for individual to be involved in village meeting. It is also important for the government to involve the other rural institutions

to help playing the roles cannot be played by RT.

Theoretically, this study also suggests that preparing the technical regulations, improving the capacity of local institutions and restructuring rural institutional setting should be an important step before decentralization is launched. To be successful in promoting participatory rural development, decentralization requires strong commitment and continuous support from the government to overcome the problems of implementation at grassroots level.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Permendagri 7/1983 tentang Pembentukan RT dan RW
- 2 Government Regulation 72/2005 on Village; Presidential Regulation 49/2001 on Guideline of Rural Community Institution; Regulation of Ministry of Home Affairs 5/2007 on Guideline of Rural Community Institution Arrangement
- 3 Peraturan Bupati Purbalingga No. 14 tahun 2010 tentang Pedoman Alokasi Dana Desa

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