
**IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CULTURALLY-SENSITIVE INDEPENDENT
WOMEN'S CLASS PROGRAM AT THE NORTH SUMATRA PROVINCIAL
AGENCY FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT, CHILD PROTECTION AND
FAMILY PLANNING**



M. Sufrizal Amri Harahap¹
Universitas Medan Area, Medan, Indonesia
sufrizalharahap@gmail.com

Syafruddin Ritonga²
Universitas Medan Area, Medan, Indonesia
syafruddin@staff.uma.ac.id

Maksum Syahri Lubis³
Universitas Medan Area, Medan, Indonesia
maksum@staff.uma.ac.id

Abstract

Gender equality is one of the main goals of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) launched by the United Nations. Women's empowerment is an important element in achieving equitable, sustainable, and inclusive development. North Sumatra Province still faces challenges in achieving the Gender Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), which indicate that the role and position of women in development is not yet optimal. In an effort to address these issues, the North Sumatra Provincial Government, through the Office of Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, and Family Planning (DP3AKB), initiated the Independent and Cultured Women's Class Program (KELAPA MUDA). This study aims to analyze the implementation of the Independent and Cultured Women's Class Program and identify the factors that support and hinder its implementation. The research method used is descriptive qualitative with data collection techniques through interviews, observation, and documentation. The results of the study show that the implementation of the program has been carried out in accordance with the policy objectives, but has not been optimal due to limited resources, suboptimal coordination between organizations, and the influence of socio-cultural conditions in each region.

Keywords: Policy Implementation, Women's Empowerment, Local Wisdom, KELAPA MUDA (Culturally Independent Women's Class)

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality and women's empowerment are strategic issues in contemporary public development. In the paradigm of public administration, policies that favor women have become important instruments for realizing social justice, improving welfare, and ensuring inclusive participation of society. Nevertheless, the success of a policy is not only determined at the formulation stage, but is highly dependent on the implementation process in the field.

According to Van Meter and Van Horn's theory (1975), policy implementation refers to actions carried out by individuals or groups to achieve the objectives that have been set in policy decisions. This model emphasizes that the success of implementation is influenced by six main variables, namely policy standards and objectives, resources, inter-organizational communication, the characteristics of implementing organizations, economic, social, and political conditions, and the disposition of implementers.

The global agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), launched by the United Nations in 2015, also places gender equality as the fifth objective. UN Women (2015) explains that empowering women is an essential prerequisite for achieving quality-of-life indicators. In line with this view, Moser (1993) states that women's empowerment includes increasing access to resources, strengthening roles in decision-making, and fostering critical awareness of women's rights. With improved capacity, women are expected to contribute more significantly to social and economic development.

In Indonesia, the commitment to gender equality has been supported by strong policy foundations, among others through Presidential Instruction Number 9 of 2000 on Gender Mainstreaming in National Development. This policy mandates local governments to carry out programs that enhance the quality of life and independence of women. The concept of programs as realizations of public policy is described by Arikunto and Jabar (2009), who state that a program is a planned and continuous unit of activities implemented within an organization to achieve specific objectives. Therefore, local governments are required not only to design innovative programs but also to implement them effectively.

North Sumatra Province still faces serious challenges in gender empowerment. In 2020, the Gender Development Index (GDI) of North Sumatra reached 90.67 points, which is below the national achievement of 91.06 points. Similarly, the Gender Empowerment Index (GEI) was only 67.52, far behind the national average of 75.57. These low figures indicate that the position of women in some regions remains marginalized due to strong patriarchal values. According to Umar (2010) and Narwoko & Suyanto (2004), gender inequality generally arises from socio-cultural constructions that restrict women's roles mainly to domestic spheres. Consequently, women find it difficult to access economic opportunities and social-political participation.

In response to these issues, the Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, and Family Planning Office of North Sumatra Province (DP3AKB) initiated the Women's Independent and Cultured Class Program, known as KELAPA MUDA. This program was designed as an innovation for empowering women based on local cultural values through cross-sector collaboration involving government, private sectors, and community groups. Grindle (1980), in her implementation theory, emphasizes that the success of program execution is largely determined by the content of the policy and the environment in which it is implemented. In the context of KELAPA MUDA, the program integrates the

enhancement of productive economic skills, the strengthening of critical gender awareness, and the preservation of cultural values as women's social capital.

Although the KELAPA MUDA Program succeeded in winning Second Place in the 2023 North Sumatra Regional Innovation Competition, its implementation effectiveness still needs to be academically evaluated. Edwards III (1980) states that limitations in human resources, budget support, and policy communication are key factors that often hinder successful implementation. With target areas covering 33 districts and cities, DP3AKB North Sumatra faces major challenges in ensuring that the program is implemented evenly and sustainably. Therefore, the study of this program implementation is important for assessing the extent to which the variables proposed by Van Meter and Van Horn have been fulfilled in the execution of KELAPA MUDA during 2023–2024.

Based on this background, this article aims to analyze the implementation of the Women's Independent and Cultured Class Program at DP3AKB North Sumatra Province and to identify supporting and inhibiting factors. This research is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the study of culture-based public policy implementation and to offer practical input for improving the effectiveness of women's empowerment programs in North Sum Sumatra.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Policy Implementation

Policy implementation is an important stage in the public policy cycle. Implementation is understood as the process of translating formulated policies into concrete actions in the field. The success of a policy is largely determined by the effectiveness of its implementation. Van Meter and Van Horn state that policy implementation is influenced by six main variables, namely policy standards and objectives, resources, interorganizational communication, characteristics of the implementing organization, the disposition of the implementers, and social, economic, and political conditions.

Policy implementation is not only related to technical aspects of execution, but also includes communication, coordination, and the commitment of implementers. Thus, implementation serves as a bridge between formulated policies and tangible results felt by the community.

Programs and Policies

Programs are the tangible form of public policy implementation. Programs can be understood as a series of activities that are planned and implemented continuously to achieve specific objectives. Government programs are designed as instruments to address public issues and improve the welfare of the community.

In the context of women's empowerment, government programs serve as a means to increase women's capacity, independence, and participation in development. The success of these programs depends heavily on careful planning, resource support, and the involvement of various parties.

Gender and Women's Empowerment

Gender is a social and cultural construct that distinguishes the roles, functions, and responsibilities of men and women. Gender differences often influence access to and control over resources and participation in decision-making. Women's empowerment is

defined as the process of improving women's abilities so that they have equal access, participation, control, and benefits in development.

Women's empowerment cannot be separated from the context of local culture. On the one hand, culture can be a social asset that strengthens the role of women, but on the other hand, patriarchal culture can be an obstacle. Therefore, women's empowerment strategies need to integrate local wisdom values in order to be more accepted by the community.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with an inductive approach. This approach was chosen to obtain an in-depth and comprehensive picture of the implementation of the Independent and Cultured Women's Class Program. The research was conducted at the Office of Women's Empowerment, Child Protection and Family Planning of North Sumatra Province.

The research informants consisted of the Head of the Office, the Head of Women's Empowerment, and participants of the Independent and Cultured Women's Class Program. Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. Data analysis was carried out through the stages of data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of the Women's Independent and Cultured Class Program (KELAPA MUDA) at the Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, and Family Planning Office (DP3AKB) of North Sumatra Province was analyzed using the Van Meter and Van Horn Policy Implementation Model. The data were obtained through in-depth interviews and field observations. The results of the analysis are narratively described based on each indicator as follows:

Policy Standards and Objectives

According to Van Meter and Van Horn (1975), policy standards and objectives constitute the main foundation that must be clearly understood by implementers so that program execution can proceed in the intended direction. In the context of the KELAPA MUDA Program, DP3AKB of North Sumatra Province has established clear policy objectives, namely to enhance the capacity of women to become economically independent, to develop critical awareness of their rights, and to preserve local cultural values.

The research findings indicate that, formally, program standards have been outlined in technical guidelines and operational instructions. Officials at the provincial level understand that this program is an integrated innovation combining productive economic dimensions and cultural strengthening. However, at the district and city levels, the understanding of these standards and objectives is not yet fully consistent. Some regions interpret the program primarily as skills-training activities, while aspects related to gender awareness and cultural values have not received balanced attention. From the perspective of program participants, the policy objectives are perceived positively. The majority of participants understand that KELAPA MUDA serves as a learning space to strengthen skills, increase knowledge, and build self-confidence. This shows that the objectives of the

policy have been conveyed to the target group, although the implementation standards still require alignment and uniform perception.

Resources The resource variable

According to Van Meter and Van Horn (1975), includes the adequacy of funding, the quality of human resources, and program supporting facilities. Effective policy implementation requires sufficient resources.

Field findings reveal that DP3AKB has allocated a specific budget for this program and has appointed facilitators and activity assistants. Nevertheless, the limited number of human resources remains a major constraint. The ratio between facilitators and the large number of target groups across 33 districts and cities is not yet balanced. Consequently, the mentoring process cannot be conducted intensively and sustainably. Budget limitations also affect the frequency of program activities. The program has not yet been implemented massively in all target areas, particularly in remote regions that require higher operational costs. In terms of infrastructure, training facilities are considered helpful by participants, but they are not evenly distributed and are not yet able to support post-training activities.

Inter-Organizational Communication Inter-organizational communication

According to Van Meter and Van Horn (1975), emphasizes the importance of effective coordination between policy makers and implementing organizations. In the implementation of the KELAPA MUDA Program, communication mechanisms have been carried out through coordination meetings, circular letters, and activity reports. DP3AKB of North Sumatra Province has conducted socialization to DP3AKB offices at the district and city levels as well as to partner agencies. The program also involves collaboration with private sectors, universities, and women's organizations.

However, the research results show that such communication has not been fully effective. Differences in understanding between levels of government regarding priorities and activity methods still occur. Cross-sector coordination has not yet been developed within a structured system and tends to be administrative and formal in nature.

Characteristics of Implementing Organizations

According to Van Meter and Van Horn (1975), the success of implementation is also influenced by the capacity and characteristics of implementing organizations. DP3AKB of North Sumatra Province has a clear organizational structure, duties, and functions as an institution responsible for women's empowerment. The organization's commitment to the KELAPA MUDA Program is relatively high, as reflected in the existence of policy innovations, technical guidelines, and the active involvement of the women's empowerment division.

Nevertheless, organizational capacity at the district and city levels is not yet evenly distributed. Differences in institutional capability, organizational culture, and the support of local leadership affect the quality of implementation. In some regions, the program runs well due to strong commitment from officials, while in others implementation is less optimal because of limited institutional capacity.

Social, Economic, and Political Conditions

According to Van Meter and Van Horn (1975), the external environment is an important factor in policy implementation. The findings indicate that social and cultural conditions in North Sumatra are highly diverse.

In urban areas such as Medan City, public acceptance of women's empowerment programs is relatively high. Better literacy levels and awareness of program benefits encourage more active participation from women.

Disposition of Implementers

According to Van Meter and Van Horn (1975), The disposition indicator model relates to the attitudes, motivation, and commitment of policy implementers. The research findings show that officials at DP3AKB of North Sumatra Province demonstrate strong commitment to carrying out the program. Implementers understand the importance of culture-based women's empowerment and show positive attitudes toward the policy, including efforts to adapt methods to local needs. However, at the district and city levels the disposition of implementers is not yet uniform. Differences in seriousness and motivation result in varying quality of socialization and program supervision. Implementation success often depends on individual initiatives from facilitators or local leaders rather than on collective institutional commitment.

Supporting Factors In The Implementation Of The KELAPA MUDA

Program The implementation of the Women's Independent and Cultured Class Program (KELAPA MUDA) at the Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, and Family Planning Office (DP3AKB) of North Sumatra Province cannot be separated from various factors that positively encourage the success of its execution. Based on the results of field research, several main elements were identified as strengths and supporting factors in the policy implementation process.

First, the most fundamental supporting factor is the clarity of policy objectives and regulatory support. The KELAPA MUDA Program was initiated as a form of local government commitment in following up on the national policy of gender mainstreaming. DP3AKB of North Sumatra Province has formally formulated program standards through technical guidelines, enabling implementers to have operational references in carrying out culture-based women's empowerment activities.

Second, strong support is found in the aspect of commitment and positive attitudes of implementers. Officials at DP3AKB of North Sumatra Province demonstrate seriousness in implementing this program as a leading regional innovation.

Third, the existence of inter-organizational communication and coordination mechanisms also becomes an important supporting factor. The KELAPA MUDA Program is implemented through cross-sector collaboration involving DP3AKB at the provincial level, DP3AKB offices at the district and city levels, private sectors, universities, and women's organizations.

Fourth, another supporting factor is the positive acceptance and participation of the program's target group. Participants from diverse backgrounds perceive the KELAPA MUDA Program as a strategic space for improving productive economic skills, expanding insight, and strengthening self-confidence. In practice, the local cultural approach adopted by DP3AKB makes participants feel emotionally closer to the program, thus motivating them to be actively involved.

Fifth, the success of this program in obtaining political appreciation and recognition as a regional innovation strengthens the legitimacy of the policy. Achieving Second Place in the 2023 North Sumatra Regional Innovation Competition proves that the KELAPA MUDA Program receives support from the government and stakeholders.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research and discussion regarding the implementation of the Independent and Cultured Women's Class Program at the North Sumatra Provincial Office of Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, and Family Planning, several conclusions can be drawn as follows.

The implementation of the Independent Women's Cultural Class Program has basically been carried out in accordance with the established policy objectives. This program is designed as an effort to empower women through capacity building, economic independence, and strengthening the role of women with an approach based on local cultural values. The program standards and objectives have been understood by the implementing officials and participants, so that the program implementation has a clear direction in supporting women's empowerment in North Sumatra Province. However, the implementation of the program in the field has not been fully optimal and evenly distributed across all regions. Differences in socio-cultural conditions, institutional capacity, and resource support in each region have led to variations in program implementation. This has resulted in the program not yet maximally reaching all women groups targeted by the policy.

Factors supporting program implementation include the commitment of implementing officials, local government policy support, and the relevance of the program to the needs of women in the community. The Independent and Cultured Women's Class program is considered capable of addressing women's needs for improved skills, self-confidence, and social roles, thus receiving a fairly positive response from participants. Factors hindering program implementation include limited human resources and budget, suboptimal coordination and communication between organizations, and the continuing strong influence of patriarchal values in society. These factors affect the level of women's participation and the effectiveness of program implementation at the regional level.

Thus, it can be concluded that the Independent and Cultured Women's Class Program has great potential in supporting women's empowerment in North Sumatra Province. However, to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of the program, it is necessary to strengthen resources, improve coordination between agencies, and adopt a more adaptive approach to local socio-cultural conditions so that the program's objectives can be optimally achieved.

REFERENCES

- Arikunto, S., & Jabar, C. S. (2009). *Evaluasi Program Pendidikan: Pedoman Teoritis Praktis bagi Mahasiswa dan Praktisi Pendidikan*. Jakarta: Bumi Aksara.
- Dunn, W. N. (1998). *Pengantar Analisis Kebijakan Publik*. Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press.
- Edwards III, G. C. (1984). *Implementing Public Policy*. Washington DC: Congressional Quarterly Press.
- Grindle, M. S. (1980). *Politics and Policy Implementation in the Third World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Moser, C. (1993). *Gender Planning and Development: Theory, Practice and Training*. London: Routledge.
- Narwoko, J., & Yuryanto, B. (2004). *Sosiologi: Teks Pengantar dan Terapan*. Jakarta: Kencana.
- Sugiyono.(2014). *Metode Penelitian Kombinasi (Mixed Methods)*. Bandung: Alfabeta.
- UN Women. (2015). *Progress of the World's Women 2015–2016: Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights*. New York: UN Women.
- Van Meter, D. S., & Van Horn, C. E. (1975). *The Policy Implementation Process: A Conceptual Framework*. *Administration & Society*, 6(4), 445–488.
- Umar, N. (2010). *Argumen Kesetaraan Gender Perspektif Al-Quran*. Jakarta: Paramadina
- Kementerian Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak Republik Indonesia.(2020). *Pembangunan Manusia Berbasis Gender*. Jakarta: KPPPA.
- Peraturan Presiden Republik Indonesia Nomor 59 Tahun 2017 tentang Pelaksanaan Pencapaian Tujuan Pembangunan Berkelanjutan.
- Instruksi Presiden Republik Indonesia Nomor 9 Tahun 2000 tentang Pengarusutamaan Gender dalam Pembangunan Nasional