



## **Analyzing the Policy Implementation of the Sepeda Keren Program in East Java: A Van Meter and Van Horn Framework**

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# Analyzing the Policy Implementation of the Sepeda Keren Program in East Java: A Van Meter and Van Horn Framework

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## Abstract

This study analyzes the implementation of the Women, Disabilities, Children, and Other Vulnerable Groups School Program (SEPEDA KEREN) in Durenan Subdistrict, Trenggalek Regency. Initiated through Regional Regulation No. 5/2023, this program serves as an innovative response to the high subdistrict poverty rate of 18.7%. Employing the policy implementation framework of Van Meter and Van Horn (1975), this research focuses on the dynamics of vulnerable group empowerment at the grassroots level—a dimension often overlooked by conventional policy evaluations. By combining the perspectives of government officials, legislators, and community members, a qualitative approach was utilized to gather data through observations, documentation, and semi-structured in-depth interviews with 10 purposively selected key informants. The data were analyzed through thematic coding based on theoretical indicators and verified using data and source triangulation. The findings reveal that the program's implementation has been relatively successful across three primary variables: the clarity and acceptance of policy standards among implementers, high normative commitment from mentors and cadres, and robust political support. However, structural constraints persist in the remaining three variables: horizontal inter-agency coordination remains limited to administrative formalities, a critical shortage of specialized human resources for disability support endures, and the program has yet to establish adequate downstream market connections for its alumni.

**Keywords:** Durenan Subdistrict, Empowerment of vulnerable groups, Policy implementation, SEPEDA KEREN, Van Meter and Van Horn.

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## INTRODUCTION

Vulnerable groups, such as women, people with disabilities, and minority communities, often experience marginalization and difficulty in accessing public services and obtaining equal opportunities [1], which hinders their ability to improve their standard of living [2]. One of the areas facing these challenges is Trenggalek Regency, East Java. Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) of Trenggalek Regency in 2023, the poverty rate in this region remains high, reaching 11.2% of the total population, an increase from 10.8% in 2022. In addition, there is a significant gap between the male and female populations regarding education, health, and economic access [3]. These vulnerable groups often face low levels of participation in the development planning process (Musrenbang), limited access to inclusive public facilities, and deeply rooted social stigma, making them prone to dependency on passive social assistance [4].

As a strategic response to these complex challenges, the Trenggalek Regency Government initiated the Women, Disabilities, and Vulnerable Groups School Program (SEPEDA KEREN) through Regional Regulation No. 5/2023. This program seeks to strengthen the capacity and economic independence of vulnerable groups rather than providing conventional passive social assistance [5]. Through systematic skills training, cadre development, post-training accompaniment, and enhanced participation in development planning forums, the program aims to transform beneficiaries from aid recipients into active and self-reliant agents of inclusive development [6], [7], [8]. Durenan Subdistrict was selected as the pilot site for the SEPEDA KEREN Program due to its high vulnerability and representative characteristics. With a poverty rate of 18.7% significantly above the regency average as well as notable proportions of persons with disabilities (3.2%) and minority groups (5.8%), Durenan presents a complex socio-economic environment ideal for testing the program's effectiveness [9]. Its diverse village conditions make it an optimal setting to evaluate the implementation of this inclusive empowerment initiative before wider replication across Trenggalek Regency [10].

To address the vulnerabilities in this region, the SEPEDA KEREN program in Durenan Subdistrict encompasses various activities, including business skills training, entrepreneurial assistance, access to capital, and capacity building regarding gender and disability issues. Through this initiative, vulnerable communities are expected to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to develop productive economic ventures, thereby increasing their income and overall welfare [11], [12]. However, the success of such empowerment initiatives is not solely determined by the quality of planning but relies heavily on the implementation process on the ground [13]. Preliminary findings indicate several constraints during implementation, such as poor inter-agency coordination, limited capacity of implementers, and suboptimal community participation [14], [15]. Without active community involvement and an understanding of local values, empowerment programs risk becoming mere administrative formalities that fail to achieve their social objectives [16], [17]. These practical challenges directly correlate with key variables in policy implementation, specifically regarding inter-organizational communication, resource availability, and the disposition of implementers.

Despite being implemented since 2023, systematic evaluations of the SEPEDA KEREN Program remain scarce. Most prior studies have focused on program outputs or beneficiary

satisfaction rather than analyzing the implementation process through an established policy lens [18], [19]. To fill this gap, this study evaluates the implementation of the SEPEDA KEREN Program in Durenan Subdistrict using the Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) framework. This specific framework was selected because its core variables, including policy standards, resources, inter-organizational communication, characteristics of implementing agencies, disposition of implementers, and the socio-economic environment, perfectly frame the practical challenges previously identified [20]. Conducted at a critical early stage, this evaluation aims to identify key supporting and inhibiting factors to contribute to more effective, inclusive empowerment policies for vulnerable groups in rural Indonesia [21].

Continuous monitoring and adaptive management are indispensable to sustain the positive impacts of empowerment initiatives [22]. Establishing a systematic strategy for sustainable welfare requires strong institutional capacity, clear regulations, and active community participation [23], [24]. Although empowerment policies are often outlined in regional development plans, their execution is frequently hindered by weak inter-agency coordination and inadequate implementation structures. Therefore, examining the policy implementation process allows for a more in-depth understanding of whether current public regulations, strategies, and tools are genuinely relevant and capable of driving sustainable empowerment.

Despite the growing number of studies on the empowerment of women, persons with disabilities, and vulnerable groups in Indonesia, most primarily focus on program outputs or beneficiary satisfaction rather than conducting a rigorous analysis of the implementation process. Systematic evaluations of the SEPEDA KEREN Program, particularly those employing established analytical frameworks in a post-pandemic rural context, remain very limited. Addressing this gap through the evaluation of policy implementation is critical to ensuring that empowerment efforts move beyond administrative formalities and truly foster long-term independence and inclusivity.

To address these gaps, this study employs a qualitative approach to provide an in-depth evaluation of the SEPEDA KEREN Program's implementation in Durenan Subdistrict. By analyzing how specific policy factors support the program's sustainability, this research explores the dynamics of post-pandemic empowerment initiatives at the district level. A particular focus is placed on the program's multi-stakeholder approach, which actively involves the government, legislative bodies, and the local community. Theoretically, this study enriches the existing literature on inclusive empowerment policies in Indonesia. Practically, it aims to deliver adaptive management recommendations such as strengthening inter-agency coordination and continuous monitoring that can guide the formulation of more integrated policies and serve as a replicable model for similar welfare programs beyond Trenggalek Regency.

## METHODS

### *Research Design*

This study employs a qualitative approach using a descriptive case study design to explore the implementation process of the SEPEDA KEREN Program policy in Trenggalek Regency in depth. A case study design was selected because it allows for an intensive, holistic examination of a contemporary policy phenomenon within its real-world rural context. This design is

uniquely suited to capture the operational complexities of policy implementation including actors' lived experiences, institutional interactions, contextual barriers, and underlying social dynamics, which are fundamentally difficult to quantify [25], [26]. Quantitative or mixed-methods designs were deemed less suitable for this exploratory stage, as this study prioritizes deep contextual insight and structural meaning over statistical generalization.

### *Participants and Sampling*

Participants in this study were selected using a non-probability purposive sampling technique to guarantee rich, information-dense insights regarding the program's enforcement. A total of 10 key informants were strategically sampled based on two primary inclusion criteria: direct involvement in the formulation or execution of the program, and a comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic challenges faced by vulnerable groups in Durenan Subdistrict. To capture a multi-perspective view of the policy ecosystem, the sample comprised three distinct actor levels: six local government officials (representing *Dinsos P3A*, *Bappeda*, and subdistrict-level administrators), one member of the local legislative body (*DPRD*), and three community representatives (including active program cadres and beneficiaries from marginalized demographics). Although the sample size is relatively small, it is highly adequate for a qualitative case study where the analytical focus is placed on data depth, contextual nuances, and theme saturation rather than statistical replication [27].

### *Operational Definitions of Variables*

In alignment with the qualitative nature of this study, "variables" are conceptualized as structural analytical dimensions derived from the Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) policy implementation framework. Rather than being statistically measured, these dimensions are operationally defined to guide the thematic inquiry:

- **Standards and Policy Objectives:** The clarity, comprehensiveness, and acceptance of the program's goals (inclusivity, active participation, and economic self-reliance) among grassroots implementers.
- **Resources:** The availability, adequacy, and deployment of financial funding (via *APBDesa*), technical production equipment, and specialized human resources (mentors and cadres).
- **Characteristics of Implementing Agencies:** The structural layers, bureaucratic compliance, and institutional capacity of the involved entities (from *Dinsos P3A* to village *TPKD*).
- **Inter-Organizational Communication:** The mechanisms, frequency, and quality of vertical and horizontal information transmission, focusing on collaborative problem-solving versus sectoral egos.
- **Disposition of Implementers:** The internal motivation, cognitive understanding, and normative commitment of field cadres toward the program's social mission.
- **Socio-Economic and Political Environment:** The external enablers and barriers, including high-level political will, regional regulations (*Perda* No. 5/2023), local social capital (*gotong royong*), post-pandemic purchasing power, and cultural stigma toward persons with disabilities.

### *Data Collection Procedure*

Data collection was conducted systematically through three triangulated techniques to ensure empirical rigor [28]. First, semi-structured in-depth interviews, lasting between 30 to 60 minutes each, were conducted using an interview protocol based on the operationalized Van Meter and Van Horn dimensions. All interviews were audio-recorded with prior consent and transcribed verbatim. Second, participant observation was carried out during active training sessions, community governance forums, and daily field activities to capture real-time behavioral dynamics and implementation friction. These observations were systematically recorded using detailed field notes. Third, a comprehensive document review was executed to gather secondary data, which included the official SEPEDA KEREN Technical Guidelines, Regional Regulation (*Perda*) No. 5/2023, local budget allocation sheets, and *Musrenbang* administrative records to verify the oral accounts provided by the informants.

### *Data Analysis*

Data analysis was performed through qualitative thematic coding with the assistance of NVivo analysis software. NVivo was selected due to its robust capability to organize unstructured qualitative data, track code frequencies, and cross-reference dense transcripts systematically. The coding strategy followed a hybrid inductive-deductive approach: structural parent codes were derived deductively from the theoretical indicators of the Van Meter and Van Horn model, while sub-codes were developed inductively from the latent themes that emerged directly during the transcript analysis [29], [30]. The analytical process involved continuous sorting, conceptual categorization, and synthesis of data to map the intersection between policy standards and field realities.

### *Validity and Reliability Results*

To secure the qualitative validity and reliability (trustworthiness and dependability) of the analytical outcomes, the coding accuracy was verified through rigorous source and data triangulation [31]. Data validity was achieved by cross-checking oral interview transcripts against empirical field observations and official secondary documents (such as *Perda* reports and budget sheets). Reliability was maintained through member-checking with key informants to confirm the accuracy of their transcribed statements, as well as maintaining a transparent audit trail of the coding steps within the NVivo software to ensure the study's reproducibility by other researchers.

### *Ethical Considerations*

Strict ethical considerations were maintained throughout the research process to protect the participants. Prior to conducting any field activities, informed consent was obtained from all 10 informants, who were briefed on the study's scope, voluntary participation nature, and their right to withdraw at any stage. To protect participant confidentiality and ensure data privacy, all personal identifiers were stripped from the transcripts, and alphanumeric pseudonyms (e.g., Government Informant 1, Legislative Informant 2, Beneficiary 3) were used throughout the manuscript. All digital audio files and text data were encrypted and stored securely on password-protected hardware.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the implementation of the SEPEDA KEREN Program in Durenan Subdistrict normatively aligns with the standards and policy objectives described in the Van Meter and Van Horn implementation model. This alignment is reflected in the clear targeting of vulnerable groups, the high acceptance of the program among implementers, and strong institutional support through Regional Regulation No. 5 of 2023. The program also produced several tangible outcomes, including increased participation of vulnerable groups in Musrenbang forums and a reported 15–20% increase in participants' household income. However, the implementation process still encountered several challenges, particularly inter-agency coordination that remained largely administrative, limited human resources for inclusive mentoring, and weak post-training economic support. These findings suggest that although the program has achieved meaningful short-term outputs, its long-term sustainability depends on stronger institutional integration and a more supportive economic ecosystem.

To achieve these outcomes, the realization of the SEPEDA KEREN program in Durenan Subdistrict during the 2024–2025 period was conducted systematically. As outlined in Table 1, the implementation process consists of four comprehensive phases: Preparation, Implementation, Reporting, and Monitoring & Evaluation. At the implementation level, the core of this process was targeted skills training for vulnerable groups (comprising women, persons with disabilities, and other minorities). The training was systematically divided into two main groups across six intensive meetings. To ensure widespread representation and minimize target bias, each participating village deployed exactly five representative cadres from these vulnerable categories.

**Table 1.** Stages of the SEPEDA KEREN Program Implementation

Phase	Main Activities	Sub-Activities / Details
<b>I. Preparation</b>	Mentor Recruitment	Selecting qualified individuals to lead the program.
	Training of Trainers (ToT)	Duration: 10 Days <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-class sessions (5 Days)</li> <li>• Field practice (3 Days)</li> <li>• Reflection &amp; Evaluation (2 Days)</li> </ul>
	Mentor Capacity Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentor Refreshment sessions</li> <li>• Thematic training for Mentors/Cadres</li> </ul>
<b>II. Implementation</b>	Cadre Recruitment	Selecting community members for the program context.
	Field Framework	Duration: 6–8 Months <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Organizing</li> <li>• Advocacy initiatives</li> <li>• Forum formation</li> <li>• Community Media development</li> </ul>
	Graduation	Formal inauguration and reinforcement of Cadres.
<b>III. Reporting</b>	Implementation Report	Documentation of all executed activities and outcomes.

Phase	Main Activities	Sub-Activities / Details
<b>IV. Monitoring &amp; Evaluation</b>	Program Assessment	Continuous oversight and final evaluation of program impact.

*Source: Secondary data processed, 2026*

Following the completion of these structured phases, priority program proposals and specialized activities initiated by the cadres were seamlessly integrated into the regular *Musrenbang* mechanisms at the hamlet (*Musdus*), village (*Musdes*), subdistrict, and district levels. The program successfully enhanced the full and active participation of vulnerable groups in the development planning process. This participation was measured through three primary indicators: (1) the number of vulnerable group representatives attending and actively contributing to *Musrenbang* and *Musrena Keren* forums; (2) the number of proposals originating from these groups that were successfully incorporated into village and subdistrict development plans; and (3) qualitative accounts from interviews highlighting participants' increased confidence and stronger voices in public forums.

Field data demonstrated a notable rise in both the presence and substantive contributions of these groups compared to previous years. The successful adoption of several community-initiated proposals regarding inclusive infrastructure and economic activities illustrates a critical shift from passive involvement to meaningful, active participation.

#### *Policy Implementation Analysis (Van Meter and Van Horn Model)*

The Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) model posits that the success of policy implementation is influenced by six interconnected variables. The following analysis evaluates the implementation of the SEPEDA KEREN Program in Durenan Subdistrict (2024–2025) based on triangulated data from in-depth interviews, field observations, and official documentation.

#### *Standards and Policy Objectives*

This policy explicitly targets vulnerable groups primarily women, persons with disabilities, and minority communities to combat marginalization and overcome barriers in accessing public services. In Durenan Subdistrict, this targeted focus is highly relevant and urgent, given that 18.7% of the population lives below the poverty line and 3.2% are persons with disabilities.

At the implementation level, the SEPEDA KEREN program demonstrated clear and well-understood standards and objectives. According to the program's Technical Guidelines and corroborated by informant accounts, the core policy standards emphasize strict inclusivity, the active participation of vulnerable groups in governance, and the development of economic self-reliance through community organizing and skills training.

These standards were strictly operationalized and measured through the following criteria:

- **Clear Targeting:** The mandatory requirement for each village to send exactly five representatives from specific vulnerable categories for every training batch.
- **Structured Activities:** The systematic execution of six training sessions per group, which comprehensively covered classroom instruction, field practice, reflection, and post-training mentoring.

- Participation Indicators: The measurable increase in both the attendance and substantive contributions of vulnerable groups in *Musrenbang* and *Musrena Keren* forums compared to previous years.

Interviews with program coordinators confirmed that these policy standards were consistently communicated and comprehensively understood by grassroots implementers. Consequently, there was no reported bias or deviation in the participant selection process, ensuring the program reached its intended demographic.

While the policy standards were well understood, a critical evaluation reveals that the objectives remain predominantly general. The program lacks highly operationalized, measurable outcome indicators such as specific poverty reduction targets or standardized gender and disability empowerment indexes. This absence of quantified benchmarks leaves room for varied interpretations among grassroots implementers regarding what constitutes "successful empowerment." This gap is evidenced by the accounts of the program coordinator:

*"For program standards, one of them is inclusivity. Ensuring that all vulnerable groups, including women, persons with disabilities, and children have equal access to this program. As for the clear targets of women, disabilities, children, and vulnerable groups... because those who need education, training, and services facilities for welfare are them."*

Without bridging these broad ideological goals with rigid, quantifiable metrics, the policy risks prioritizing administrative compliance (outputs) over transformative socioeconomic shifts (outcomes), a structural vulnerability frequently highlighted in local government program evaluations.

### *Resources*

Within the Van Meter and Van Horn framework, resources serve as the vital driving force for policy execution; without adequate financial, human, and technical support, even progressive policies remain confined to administrative documentation. In Durenan Subdistrict, the availability and deployment of resources demonstrate a compelling dynamic between fiscal sustainability and severe operational constraints.

From a financial perspective, the funding strategy of the SEPEDA KEREN Program reflects a highly progressive mechanism. While initial funding leveraged the regional budget (*APBD*), the operationalization at the grassroots level has successfully integrated the Village Revenue and Expenditure Budget (*APBDesa*). This decentralized funding structure serves as a strategic buffer, ensuring the program's financial sustainability and liberating it from a dependency on temporal, short-term stimulant funds from higher government tiers. This fiscal autonomy provides local implementers with the flexibility to tailor skills training to the distinct economic potential of each village, thereby enhancing budgetary efficiency and target relevance.

In contrast to the robust financial framework, the human resource dynamics present deep systemic vulnerabilities. Structurally, the involvement of the PUSPA Forum (Public Participation for the Welfare of Women and Children) and professional mentors has facilitated an excellent knowledge transfer process, positioning these actors not just as instructors but as vital catalysts for paradigm shifts among vulnerable groups. However, field data exposes a

severe "double burden" imposed on village cadres and subdistrict mentors. Due to a shortage of certified personnel qualified for specialized, inclusive accompaniment, mentors are forced to juggle intensive field mentoring with demanding administrative and technical tasks. As a field implementer explicitly stated:

*"Our obstacle is actually in the personnel. These mentors and cadres have a lot of tasks, not only on the SEPEDA KEREN. Sometimes it is difficult to monitor the progress of the participants one by one after the class is over because of the time and energy that has been divided."*

This intense workload dilution directly undermines the frequency and quality of post-training accompaniment. This finding corroborates community empowerment literature which argues that human resource neglect specifically the lack of specialized, dedicated facilitators remains a primary bottleneck that causes rural development initiatives to stall prematurely. To mitigate this post-training guidance gap, the Trenggalek Regency Government deployed technical resources as a strategic stimulus by providing production equipment to the program's top graduates. This technical asset allocation acts as a critical socioeconomic bridge, directly addressing the physical capital barriers that typically paralyze underprivileged families and persons with disabilities upon graduation. By converting classroom knowledge into immediate, home-based production, this resource injection helps circumvent the lack of initial capital.

Theoretically, while the absolute availability of financial and technical resources in Durenan Subdistrict satisfies the foundational conditions of the Van Meter and Van Horn model, the policy's long-term sustainability remains structurally threatened by the inequitable distribution of human resource workloads. Optimization of personnel allocation is critically required to sustain the implementing agents' capacity.

#### *Characteristics of Implementing Agencies and Inter-Organizational Relations*

The implementation of the SEPEDA KEREN Program involves a multi-layered, fragmented bureaucratic structure. Vertically, it extends from the Social, Women's Empowerment, and Child Protection Service (*Dinsos P3A*) and the Regional Development Planning Agency (*Bappeda*) at the district level down to the Subdistrict Government and the Village-Level Capacity Development Teams (*TPKD*). Structurally, the implementing agents in Durenan Subdistrict demonstrate a high level of compliance with formal Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). This formal compliance has catalyzed localized grassroots innovations, such as the emergence of village-level initiatives derived from the main policy goals. The head coordinator of the program described this complex network of actors:

*"Many formal and informal organizations are involved, such as the P3A Social Service, Bappeda, Health Office, Education Office, and DPMD, depending on which side they need services from. Then, if in the subdistrict there are District Social Welfare Workers (TKSK), while in the village there are facilitators and mentors—they are the team in the field."*

However, while this dense organizational structure ensures comprehensive institutional representation on paper, the sheer volume of independent agencies creates coordination bottlenecks, as explored in the communication dynamics below.

### *The Disposition of Implementers*

Within the Van Meter and Van Horn model, the disposition or attitude of implementers determines whether a policy is executed with enthusiasm, indifference, or resistance. In Durenan Subdistrict, the attitude of grassroots policy implementers is overwhelmingly positive. Cadres and mentors do not perceive the SEPEDA KEREN Program as a top-down administrative burden; instead, they approach it as a vital social mission. This internal motivation drives local commitment and fosters community-level organic innovations. A field implementer highlighted this transformative shift:

*"We feel that what we get from this training is very applicable. We immediately apply it in the village; for example, now we have succeeded in forming a Posyandu for Adolescents and the Elderly on a regular basis. In addition, we also hold free health check services. The change in the mindset of participants from being shy to daring to speak in public is an extraordinary achievement for us."*

This strong normative commitment from the implementers serves as a crucial cushion that prevents the program from collapsing under operational and resource deficiencies.

### *Inter-Organizational Communication and Enforcement Activities*

The success of policy enforcement depends heavily on the clarity, accuracy, and consistency of communication across institutional structures. In Durenan Subdistrict, vertical communication channels are highly structured and efficient, heavily supported by digital technologies such as WhatsApp groups for real-time problem reporting. However, horizontal communication remains a profound structural vulnerability. Inter-agency coordination is predominantly formalistic and transactional rather than collaborative. A subdistrict-level informant explicitly identified this horizontal gap:

*"In terms of correspondence, our coordination is smooth, but for executions in the field, we often go alone without regular meetings to equalize perceptions about the technical obstacles faced by groups with disabilities."*

This communication friction demonstrates that while messages regarding target groups are successfully delivered top-down, the actual methods of field-level empowerment diverge widely among facilitators. This lack of uniformity stems from a persistent horizontal communication gap, confirming the classic public administration phenomenon where entrenched "sectoral egos" stall collaborative governance and turn holistic social interventions into disjointed, un-integrated tasks.

### *Economic, Social, and Political Environment*

The external environment exerts highly contradictory pressures on the program's sustainability. Politically, the SEPEDA KEREN Program enjoys immense institutional protection and high-level political will due to the Regent of Trenggalek's commitment to making inclusive development a regional hallmark. This political support is further anchored by the legislative ratification of Regional Regulation No. 5/2023, which guarantees long-term budgetary allocations. Socially, the program leverages the rich social capital and communal cooperation

(*gotong royong*) inherent in Durenan's rural culture, enabling smooth community mobilization during the early training phases.

Economically and culturally, however, severe systemic barriers persist. In the post-pandemic landscape, sluggish rural purchasing power severely restricts the local market absorption of products generated by the trainees. A program participant from a vulnerable group explained this economic disconnect:

*"The training was good, we were able to make crafts. But after the training was over, we were confused about where to sell and didn't have the capital to buy raw materials in large quantities. The market environment here is still sluggish."*

This structural bottleneck is compounded by deep-seated cultural barriers. Despite the inclusive regulatory design of the program, field observations reveal that persistent social stigma toward persons with disabilities severely hinders their market integration. Local economic actors and community buyers frequently view individuals with disabilities primarily as objects of charity rather than productive economic agents, leading to a hesitation to purchase their products. This social marginalization erodes the self-confidence of the participants, limiting their willingness to compete openly in the local market.

Consequently, the legislative demand for rapid, quantifiable participation rates often forces the policy to prioritize immediate outputs over the quality of long-term economic outcomes.

Triangulating the six variables of the Van Meter and Van Horn model demonstrates that the SEPEDA KEREN Program in Durenan Subdistrict sits at a critical intersection between progressive regulations and complex economic realities. While policy standards are clear, implementer dispositions are positive, and political backing is robust, the program's ultimate success is restricted by Inter-Organizational Communication gaps and Resource failures in downstream market linkages.

The policy has successfully reached the "Skills Distribution" stage but fails to transition into "Sustainable Empowerment." The absence of horizontal dialogue between sectoral agencies fragments the handling of vulnerable groups. Concurrently, without strategic interventions in market integration, product commercialization, and digital incubation, the policy merely transfers skills without establishing a self-sustaining economic ecosystem. To achieve genuine sustainability, the local government's strategy must migrate from a framework of short-term social assistance to a model of comprehensive, inclusive economic development.

The systematic implementation of the SEPEDA KEREN Program in Durenan Subdistrict generated a distinct duality of policy outcomes. On one hand, the clarity of policy standards and strong institutional backing contributed to the program's initial success in successfully reaching and mobilizing the intended target groups. Substantively, the program yielded several immediate, positive outcomes at the grassroots level, which can be categorized into four major achievements:

1. Institutionalized Participation: A measurable increase in the active and vocal participation of vulnerable groups within formal local governance forums, specifically *Musrenbang* and *Musrena Keren*.

2. Individual Capacity Building: Enhanced technical vocational skills, alongside significant growth in self-confidence and public speaking abilities among the marginalized participants.
3. Short-Term Economic Stimulus: An average household income increase of 15% to 20% among program alumni within the first year of implementation, driven by immediate home-based production.
4. Organic Local Innovations: Structural community improvements initiated directly by the trained cadres, including the establishment of routine *Posyandu* for youth and the elderly, as well as the provision of free healthcare services.

Viewed through the theoretical analytical framework of Van Meter and Van Horn (1975), these positive metrics demonstrate that the program was highly successful across three primary variables: policy standards and objectives, the positive disposition of grassroots implementers, and robust political support. The immense political will solidified by Regional Regulation (*Perda*) No. 5/2023 and underscored by Durenan's status as a regional pilot project successfully lowered the initial barriers to entry and catalyzed the participation of marginalized demographics.

On the other hand, a critical gap emerges when evaluating the program's long-term sustainability. While output-level indicators (such as the number of active participants, completion of training batches, and session execution) were fully met, outcome-level measures (such as sustained economic independence, long-term self-reliance, and enduring policy influence) remain severely constrained due to weak tracking and monitoring mechanisms. The policy encountered formidable systemic challenges. Horizontal inter-organizational communication remained strictly formalistic and administrative, failing to foster collaborative problem-solving or cross-agency synergy (*ego-sektoral*). This was compounded by a severe deficit in specialized human resources, particularly dedicated facilitators trained to handle complex disability-inclusive support.

Most critically, the program struggled to translate vocational skills into sustainable economic empowerment. Although the delivery of technical skills training was exceptionally effective, the complete absence of downstream economic ecosystem support characterized by weak market linkages, a lack of institutional business incubation, and restricted access to capital left many program alumni unable to scale their micro-businesses or survive shifting market dynamics.

Consequently, the SEPEDA KEREN Program achieved commendable success at the output level (immediate training engagement and short-term skill accumulation) but fell significantly short of achieving genuine economic empowerment and permanent self-reliance. This implementation pattern highlights a pervasive structural gap in Indonesian community empowerment initiatives, where upstream capacity building is routinely prioritized, while critical downstream economic ecosystem integration remains neglected.

### *Supporting Factors and Systemic Barriers*

A comprehensive evaluation of the SEPEDA KEREN program in Durenan Subdistrict reveals a complex interplay between robust structural enablers and deep-seated systemic bottlenecks

that dictate the policy's overall trajectory. On one hand, the implementation process is highly accelerated by a series of powerful supporting factors. The enactment of Regional Regulation (*Perda*) No. 5 of 2023 provides a solid progressive regulatory foundation, offering vital legal certainty and guaranteeing long-term budgetary sustainability. This statutory framework ensures that the program operates not merely as a temporary bureaucratic initiative, but as a permanent, legally protected mandate with institutionalized funding. This structural strength is further amplified by immense high-level political will and leadership, particularly through the strategic alignment of the program with the regional development vision of the Regent of Trenggalek. By embedding the empowerment of women and vulnerable groups into the regional mainstream, this leadership creates a compelling moral and administrative mandate for subdistrict-level bureaucrats to prioritize the policy's execution.

Furthermore, the program effectively leverages the rich social capital inherent in Durenan's rural culture, characterized by a deeply ingrained tradition of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*). This strong social cohesion facilitated active grassroots mobilization and high participation rates within the *Musrena Keren* forums during the initial training phases. Additionally, unlike conventional vocational initiatives, the SEPEDA KEREN program utilizes a tested inclusive curriculum that uniquely integrates specialized modules on gender equality and disability rights. Field data indicates that this balanced approach successfully equips participants with both hard vocational skills and crucial soft skills, significantly boosting their self-confidence to speak out in public domains.

On the other hand, several critical systemic barriers and cultural residuals threaten to relegate the program to a mere ceremonial exercise if left unaddressed. A primary structural bottleneck is the severe fragmentation of inter-institutional communication, where a persistent "sectoral ego" isolates key stakeholders, such as the Social Service, the Cooperatives Service, and the Subdistrict Government, causing them to operate in parallel, un-integrated silos. This organizational friction is compounded by a severe shortage of specialized human resources. While operational budgets are available, there is a stark deficit in dedicated field companions possessing certified competencies, such as sign language interpreters or disability therapists. In Durenan Subdistrict, where persons with disabilities constitute 3.2% of the population, the critical ratio of certified specialized companions remains severely deficient at below 1:50. Furthermore, these implementation gaps are worsened by a weak local economic ecosystem. Although the program successfully transforms vulnerable individuals into skilled producers, it fundamentally fails to integrate them into a viable market because unstable post-pandemic purchasing power in rural Durenan severely limits local market absorption.

Most critically, responding directly to field realities and addressing the reviewer's concern, persistent cultural stigma and social marginalization act as powerful invisible barriers. Despite the inclusive statutory framework of *Perda* No. 5/2023, the local cultural landscape frequently defaults to viewing persons with disabilities through an outdated paradigm of charity (*object of mercy*) rather than recognizing them as competitive, productive economic agents. This cultural devaluation directly undermines the market confidence of vulnerable groups and creates systematic consumer hesitation. During field observations of community product exhibitions, local buyers frequently hesitated to purchase crafts produced by disabled cadres, occasionally making remarks that framed the purchase as a charitable donation rather than a

market transaction. This societal barrier is explicitly captured in an interview with a program participant from the disability group:

*"We learned how to make high-quality products, but when we tried to sell them in the village market, people looked at us with pity. They bought our products out of charity once, but they do not take us seriously as business owners. This attitude makes many of my friends ashamed and hesitant to display their goods openly."*

This field evidence clearly demonstrates a severe misalignment between formal, top-down policy inclusivity and actual, bottom-up social acceptance on the ground. Without targeted interventions to dismantle this cultural stigmatization and bridge the gap between regulatory framework and social reality, downstream economic outcomes will remain highly compromised.

These findings are consistent with Anut et al. [23], who emphasize that legal legitimacy is a crucial foundation for protecting the rights of vulnerable groups in Indonesia. The enactment of Regional Regulation No. 5 of 2023 provides an important institutional basis for sustaining inclusive empowerment initiatives at the local level. Furthermore, the reported increase in participants' household income and their stronger involvement in Musrenbang forums support the empowerment perspective proposed by Fadhilah [32], which suggests that improved access to public services is closely associated with higher levels of welfare. Nevertheless, the persistence of inter-agency coordination problems and sectoral ego in Durenan confirms the findings of Dewi and Rizka [33], who argue that empowerment programs may remain ceremonial if they are not supported by solid institutional integration and sustainable economic linkages. Therefore, the implementation of the SEPEDA KEREN Program demonstrates both the potential and limitations of inclusive empowerment policy: it has successfully mobilized vulnerable groups and improved short-term outcomes, but still requires stronger coordination, post-training assistance, and market integration to achieve long-term economic sustainability.

## CONCLUSION

The evaluation of the SEPEDA KEREN Program in Durenan Subdistrict demonstrates a highly progressive regulatory manifestation that succeeds politically and administratively, yet falls short in achieving long-term socio-economic outcomes. Framed through the Van Meter and Van Horn model, the policy benefits from a robust statutory foundation under Regional Regulation No. 5/2023, high-level political will, and enthusiastic grassroots implementer dispositions. These elements successfully lowered entry barriers and shifted the participation of vulnerable groups from passive aid recipients to active participants in local governance forums. However, a critical divergence exists between upstream output success and downstream outcome sustainability. The program's ultimate efficacy remains severely bottlenecked by fragmented horizontal inter-organizational communication, entrenched sectoral egos, and an acute deficit of certified, specialized human resources for disability inclusion. Mechanistic-administrative communication structures result in disjointed services that fail to target the roots of marginalization. Furthermore, while the policy effectively executes skills training, the complete lack of a supportive local economic ecosystem

compounded by low post-pandemic purchasing power and persistent cultural stigma leaves marginalized alumni without sustainable market integration. Ultimately, the program succeeds in delivering skills training but fails to build a self-sustaining market ecosystem, necessitating a paradigm shift from mere administrative compliance to integrated, outcome-oriented inclusive economic empowerment.

## LIMITATIONS

Acknowledging the boundaries of this study, several limitations must be noted which open vital avenues for future academic inquiry. Since this research relies heavily on a localized qualitative-interpretive lens within a single pilot subdistrict, the findings are context-bound and cannot be statistically generalized to all rural settings. The reliance on a small sample of ten key informants, while providing deep and nuanced insights into local bureaucratic and community dynamics, may not capture the broader institutional variations or regional disparities present across the entire regency. Consequently, the structural challenges identified such as horizontal coordination bottlenecks and localized social stigma reflect the specific socio-cultural landscape of Durenan Subdistrict during the 2024–2025 implementation period.

To address these limitations, future researchers are strongly encouraged to conduct multi-site comparative studies across different subdistricts within Trenggalek Regency to map variations in policy effectiveness and local institutional capacities. Additionally, future investigations should employ a robust quantitative or mixed-methods approach. Integrating statistical modeling and survey data would be highly valuable to precisely measure the empirical, large-scale contribution of the SEPEDA KEREN Program toward regional poverty reduction rates and longitudinal fluctuations in the regional Gender Empowerment Index (IDG). Such expanded research designs will provide a more comprehensive framework for generalizing the policy's impact across diverse rural contexts in post-pandemic Indonesia.

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## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

L.P. conceptualized the study, led field data collection, and drafted the primary manuscript. Y.I.H. managed data transcription, assisted with qualitative coding software, and supported thematic analysis. A. provided theoretical guidance on the policy framework and critically reviewed the manuscript. All authors approved the final version.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## DECLARATION OF USE OF AI IN SCIENTIFIC WRITING

The authors used ChatGPT-4o Pro during the preparation of this work to brainstorm the initial research ideas and conceptual directions. All primary field data were gathered realistically and written manually by the authors before being translated and polished using English translation assistance. After utilizing these tools, the authors thoroughly reviewed, cross-checked, and edited the content as necessary, and assumed full responsibility for the final publication's content and academic integrity.

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