

Assessing Local Economic Empowerment Governance through the Palangka Raya Economic Heroes Program

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ABSTRACT

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Poverty remains a multidimensional issue affecting community welfare, particularly in access to economic opportunities, education, and social services. To address this issue, the Government of Palangka Raya implemented the Pahlawan Ekonomi Palangka Raya (PEP) Program as a community economic empowerment initiative aimed at reducing poverty through business assistance, entrepreneurship training, and mentoring. This study aims to analyze the governance of the PEP Program in poverty alleviation efforts in Palangka Raya. The research employed a qualitative method with a descriptive analytical approach. The subjects involved were representatives of the Social Service Office of Palangka Raya who directly participated in program management and implementation. Data were collected through interviews and documentation using interview guidelines and official supporting documents as research instruments. The data analysis process included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that the PEP Program contributed to improving community economic empowerment and supporting poverty alleviation through productive business development. However, challenges remain, including inaccurate beneficiary data, uneven program distribution, and weak monitoring systems. The study concludes that effective governance, transparency, and continuous evaluation are essential to improving program sustainability and effectiveness. The research also implies the importance of strengthening local government capacity and collaboration among stakeholders in implementing sustainable community empowerment policies effectively consistently.

INTRODUCTION

Poverty is a multidimensional and complex development problem. From a multidimensional perspective, poverty is understood as a condition that is not only related to the inability to meet basic needs, but also includes low income, limited access to education, limited employment opportunities, and an inadequate quality of life (Nuraini et al., 2025). According to the World Bank Group (2025), poverty refers to a condition in which individuals lack sufficient economic resources to satisfy their basic needs and attain a decent standard of living. The measurement of poverty is based on international poverty lines that consider consumption or expenditure levels and adjust for differences in living costs across regions and countries. Meanwhile, according to Badan Pusat Statistik (2014), poverty is measured based on the basic needs approach, which refers to a condition of economic inability to fulfill essential needs, both food and non-food, with the assessment based on the poverty line.

In Indonesia, poverty alleviation is one of the main priorities in the national development agenda, implemented through various social protection programs, economic empowerment initiatives, and efforts to improve access to basic services for poor and vulnerable communities (Tim Nasional Percepatan Penanggulangan Kemiskinan, 2010). In line with the principle of decentralization (the delegation of authority), as regulated in Law Number 23 of 2014 concerning Regional Government, local governments have the authority and responsibility to formulate and implement social policies tailored to the charac-

teristics and needs of their respective regions. Therefore, the success of poverty alleviation efforts is not only determined by national policies, but also largely depends on the capacity, commitment, and active role of local governments in translating these policies into well-targeted programs.

Based on data from Badan Pusat Statistik (2025), the national poverty rate in September 2025 was recorded at 8.25 percent. Meanwhile, the poverty rate in Palangka Raya stood at 3.62 percent, which is relatively lower than the national average. Palangka Raya is the capital city of Central Kalimantan, characterized by a vast area and relatively lower population density compared to other major cities in Indonesia. The economy of Palangka Raya is primarily driven by the service sector, trade, and governmental activities as an administrative center. Nevertheless, a portion of the population still depends on the informal sector and small-scale enterprises, which are vulnerable to changes in economic conditions.

Geographically, the vast territorial area and uneven distribution of settlements have resulted in unequal access to public services and economic opportunities. In addition, the flow of urbanization (population migration) from surrounding regencies to Palangka Raya has increased competition for employment, particularly in the informal sector. This condition indicates that although the poverty rate tends to be lower than the national average, there are still groups of people living in vulnerable conditions who require well-targeted policies.

A general decline in the poverty rate does not necessarily eliminate disparities in access to economic resources, employment opportunities, and basic social services. Income inequality among different social groups, as well as limited economic access for vulnerable populations, remain significant challenges in efforts to reduce poverty at the regional level. As a response to poverty at the local level, the Government of Palangka Raya has initiated the Pahlawan Ekonomi Palangka Raya (PEP) Program, which focuses on strengthening household economic empowerment through business capital assistance, entrepreneurship training, and continuous mentoring to promote independence and increase household income (Badan Pemeriksa Keuangan Perwakilan Provinsi Kalimantan Tengah, 2024). This program is designed not only to provide short-term economic support, but also to enhance the capacity of community-based enterprises to grow sustainably. This approach is in line with the view of Miski (2022), who states that community empowerment is a process of enhancing the capacity and independence of communities so that they can act optimally in accordance with their dignity and worth, as well as fulfill their rights and responsibilities as members of society and citizens.

However, various studies show that the implementation of social assistance programs still faces several challenges. Ajun A.S. et al. (2024) emphasize that the main problems lie in the inaccuracy of beneficiary data and the lack of socialization, which lead to mistargeting in the distribution of assistance. Meanwhile, Yunitia I. and Agustang A. (2021) highlight broader impacts, including the emergence of social jealousy, conflicts of interest, and declining public trust in the government due to irregularities in aid distribution. From a public policy evaluation perspective, William N. Dunn (2003) argues that the success of a policy should be assessed based on criteria such as effectiveness, efficiency, adequacy, equity, responsiveness, and accuracy. Therefore, evaluating regional social assistance programs is essential to ensure that they genuinely contribute to a substantive reduction in poverty levels.

Previous studies on social assistance in Indonesia have tended to focus on national programs, such as the Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH) and the Bantuan Pangan Non Tunai (BPNT), while research on region-based social assistance programs remains relatively limited, particularly in Palangka Raya. This limitation indicates the existence of a research gap in analyzing the effectiveness of local social assistance programs through a public policy evaluation approach. Based on the above explanation, this study aims to evaluate the Pahlawan Ekonomi Palangka Raya (PEP) Program in efforts to reduce poverty in Palangka Raya using a public policy evaluation perspective. This research is expected to provide a theoretical contribution to the development of policy evaluation studies at the local level, as well as practical recommendations for improving the governance of regional social assistance programs.

Research on poverty alleviation shows that the success of programs is not solely determined by the size of the budget or the type of assistance provided, but also by the quality of governance, institutional capacity, and the empowerment strategies implemented. Various previous studies provide an overview of different perspectives on this issue. In the context of governance, research by Gemiharto I. and Rosfiantika E. (2017) emphasizes the importance of transparency and accountable social assistance distribution systems in addressing weaknesses in the disbursement of grants and social aid. In line with this, Sahar A. R. and Salomo R. V. (2018) highlight the

collaborative dimension in poverty alleviation, particularly the importance of trust and mutual understanding among actors. Both studies underline that good governance is a fundamental requirement for the success of such programs.

However, Wulandari D. A. and Wicaksono I. (2025) found that although the organizational structure for implementation has functioned well, limitations in budget and human resources remain significant obstacles in the implementation of social assistance policies. This finding indicates that good governance alone is not sufficient if it is not supported by adequate institutional capacity. On the other hand, from a local-based empowerment perspective, Alawiyah T. and Setiawan F. (2021) explain that poverty alleviation can be achieved through strengthening the potential and local wisdom of rural communities. This approach emphasizes the importance of empowerment as a long-term strategy, in contrast to social assistance approaches that tend to be short-term in nature. A similar finding is presented by Kurnia A. et al. (2026), which shows that civic entrepreneurship can increase community income when supported by innovation, commitment, business actors, and social support.

Meanwhile, research by Mubaraq A. Z. et al. (2025) emphasizes that program sustainability largely depends on institutional collaboration and the capacity of government officials. Bakari I. N. et al. (2025) further add that data accuracy and community participation in verifying aid recipients are crucial factors in improving the targeting precision of such programs. On the other hand, research by Fernanto G. et al. (2022) shows that economic empowerment policies for fishermen have not been effectively implemented due to weak performance indicators and a lack of public understanding regarding the stages of the program. This finding highlights a gap between policy planning and its implementation in the field. A similar issue is also identified by Tarina U. and Prihastuti I. C. (2024), who state that cash-for-work programs (*padat karya tunai*) tend to provide short-term impacts, while their sustainability remains dependent on program management and community participation. Furthermore, Nasila R. and Napu I. A. (2024) found a gap between the theory of social entrepreneurship and its practical implementation, resulting in job creation that does not meet expectations.

Based on the findings of these studies, it can be concluded that there are three main factors in poverty alleviation: (1) the quality of governance and collaboration among actors, (2) institutional capacity and human resources, and (3) sustainable economic empowerment strategies. Most studies have focused on social assistance, policy governance, or general empowerment at the village and regency levels. However, research specifically examining the implementation of economic empowerment programs based on assistance for poor households at the municipal government level remains limited. Although the Pahlawan Ekonomi Palangka Raya (PEP) Program is designed as an economic empowerment strategy to enhance community independence, it is not yet clearly understood how the program is implemented in practice, nor to what extent it is able to sustainably improve the capacity and income of its beneficiaries in Palangka Raya.

Therefore, research on the Analysis of the Pahlawan Ekonomi Palangka Raya (PEP) Program is important to fill this gap. This study not only examines aspects of governance and policy implementation, but also analyzes the extent to which the economic empowerment program is able to sustainably improve the capacity and income of the community at the municipal level, particularly in Palangka Raya.

Policy analysis is a series of processes within public policy aimed at providing solutions to various public problems (Suaib H. et al., 2022). Policy analysis does not only focus on policy actors, but also pays attention to the interrelationship between regulations and coordination in policy implementation so that programs can run effectively and in an integrated manner (Adiwijoyo, Purnomo, & Tarigan, 2026). Through policy analysis, a policy can be assessed in terms of how far it is able to achieve its predetermined objectives and deliver benefits to its target groups.

According to William N. Dunn (2018), policy analysis is an applied social science discipline that employs various research methods and forms of argumentation to generate policy-relevant information, which can be utilized in decision-making processes and in addressing public policy issues (Dunn, 2018, as cited in Fatmariyanti & Fauzi, 2023). Therefore, policy analysis functions as a tool to assess the effectiveness of a policy and to provide recommendations for improving policies that have been implemented.

In public policy studies, policy evaluation is considered an important step to examine the extent to which the implementation of a program or policy is able to achieve its predetermined objectives. According to Suaib H. et al. (2022), public policy refers to decisions made by authorized institutions or authorities to address specific public issues, implement particular actions, and achieve predetermined goals within the framework of governance and development.

In this study, policy analysis is used to examine how the governance of the Pahlawan Ekonomi Palangka Raya (PEP) Program operates as one of the local government initiatives aimed at improving community welfare through economic empowerment in Palangka Raya.

To conduct a systematic policy analysis, this study employs the policy evaluation model proposed by William N. Dunn. This evaluation model is used to assess the success of a policy or program based on a set of criteria that can comprehensively reflect policy performance (Dunn, 2003).

William N. Dunn states that policy evaluation can be analyzed through six main criteria: effectiveness, efficiency, adequacy, equity, responsiveness, and appropriateness. These criteria are used to assess the extent to which a policy achieves its objectives and provides benefits to society as the target group (William N. Dunn, as cited in Wijaya & Yusran, 2024).

Effectiveness refers to the achievement of policy objectives and the extent to which programs produce expected outcomes. Efficiency concerns the optimal use of resources, including time, cost, and effort, in achieving policy goals. Adequacy assesses whether policy outcomes are sufficient to address the problems and needs of society. Equity focuses on the fair distribution of policy benefits among target groups. Responsiveness measures the ability of a policy to respond to public needs, aspirations, and expectations, including through accessible public services and digital technology (Manliati, Darmawan, & Adinda, 2026). Appropriateness evaluates whether a policy is suitable and relevant to the problems it is intended to address.

In addition, the success of a policy can be seen from the extent to which it is effectively implemented in practice and generates tangible benefits for society (Ramadhaningsih & Stiawati, 2026). Therefore, the six evaluation criteria proposed by Dunn are used in this study to analyze the governance of the Pahlawan Ekonomi Palangka Raya (PEP) Program and its contribution to poverty alleviation efforts in Palangka Raya.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design with a descriptive-analytical approach to analyze the governance of the Pahlawan Ekonomi Palangka Raya (PEP) Program in poverty alleviation efforts in Palangka Raya City. A qualitative approach was chosen because it provides a deeper understanding of program implementation and actual conditions in the field. Meanwhile, the descriptive-analytical approach was used to describe and systematically analyze the phenomena under study, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the observed conditions (Mappasere & Suyuti, 2019).

This research was conducted at the Social Service Office of Palangka Raya City, Central Kalimantan Province, as the institution responsible for implementing the Pahlawan Ekonomi Palangka Raya (PEP) Program. The selection of the research location was based on the important role of the institution in managing and implementing community economic empowerment programs. In 2024, the Pahlawan Ekonomi Palangka Raya (PEP) Program targeted 153 Social Welfare Service Beneficiaries (PPKS) who had undergone assessment and verification processes. The beneficiaries were distributed across 30 urban villages within five districts in Palangka Raya City, namely Pahandut, Sabangau, Jekan Raya, Bukit Batu, and Rakumpit. Assistance was provided based on data owned by the local Social Service Office and was accompanied by the Social Service Office of Palangka Raya City.

Data collection in this study was conducted through interviews and documentation. Interviews were used to obtain in-depth information regarding the implementation of the PEP Program, challenges encountered during its implementation, and the program's impact on poverty alleviation efforts. The interviews were conducted from 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. WIB with representatives from the Social Service Office of Palangka Raya City, namely Ms. Rima Fitriani, S.T. and Ms. Zul Arafah Rovieq, S.P., M.AP. Both informants are Junior Social Extension Officers who are directly involved in the management and implementation of the PEP Program.

This study focused on informants who were directly involved in managing and implementing the PEP Program. Information regarding beneficiaries and the scope of program implementation was obtained through interviews with program managers. Meanwhile, supporting data were obtained through documentation in the form of news articles, publications, and publicly available information related to the implementation of the Pahlawan Ekonomi Palangka Raya (PEP) Program.

To ensure data validity, this study applied construct validity by developing research indicators based on the concepts used in the study and collecting data from various relevant sources. The governance of the Pahlawan Ekonomi Palangka Raya (PEP) Program was analyzed using policy evaluation indicators that served as the basis for data collection and analysis. Through this approach, the data obtained were expected to accurately represent the concepts being examined.

RESULTS

Research Findings

The research findings were obtained through interviews and documentation conducted at the Social Service Office of Palangka Raya regarding the implementation of the Pahlawan

Ekonomi Palangka Raya (PEP) Program. The results are presented based on six policy evaluation criteria proposed by William N. Dunn, namely effectiveness, efficiency, adequacy, equity, responsiveness, and appropriateness.

Table 1. Summary of Research Findings on the PEP Program

Evaluation Criteria	Research Findings
Effectiveness	The PEP Program succeeded in improving community economic independence, especially for beneficiaries who already had small businesses. The program integrates UEP and KUBE through business capital assistance, mentoring, and continuous monitoring.
Efficiency	Assistance distribution was conducted selectively through verification and validation involving sub-district (kelurahan) authorities, making the program more targeted and reducing the risk of fund misuse.
Adequacy	The program provided business capital, entrepreneurship training, and mentoring. However, the adequacy of assistance still depended on the beneficiaries' ability to manage their businesses.
Equity	The program had not fully reached all areas due to budget limitations. Nevertheless, the selection process was carried out fairly through field verification and clear beneficiary criteria.
Responsiveness	The Social Service Office conducted community satisfaction surveys and monitoring activities to accommodate public feedback and evaluate program implementation.
Appropriateness	The program was considered relevant to community needs in economic empowerment, although poverty alleviation still required support from education, health, and employment sectors.

1. Effectiveness of the PEP Program

The Program is an integration of Usaha Ekonomi Produktif (UEP) and Kelompok Usaha Bersama (KUBE). The program not only provides business capital assistance but also continuous mentoring and monitoring.

Table 2. Forms of Assistance in the PEP Program

Program Component	Description
UEP	Supports MSMEs and productive community businesses in trade, agriculture, services, and crafts.
KUBE	Group-based business assistance for poor households through collective economic activities.
Business Capital	Financial assistance for productive businesses.
Training	Entrepreneurship and business management training.
Mentoring	Continuous monitoring and evaluation of business development.

Interview findings showed that the program contributed to increasing the economic independence of beneficiaries, particularly those with existing businesses. However, the program had not significantly reduced overall poverty rates because poverty is influenced by multiple factors.

2. Efficiency of the PEP Program

Program efficiency was reflected in the aid distribution mechanism, which was implemented through a structured process involving verification and validation by kelurahan authorities and neighborhood units (RT/RW).

The process began with the beneficiary proposal stage, where potential recipients were proposed by kelurahan authorities. This was followed by the verification stage, during which field checks were conducted to ensure the accuracy of beneficiary data. The next stage was validation, where the eligibility criteria of the proposed beneficiaries were assessed to determine their suitability for the program. Afterward, the determination stage involved the selection of eligible beneficiaries based on the established criteria. Finally, the distribution stage consisted of delivering assistance to the selected recipients. Furthermore, the criteria for beneficiaries included low-income individuals who already owned small businesses and were registered in the Data Terpadu Kesejahteraan Sosial (DTKS).

Through this mechanism, the program sought to improve the accuracy, accountability, and effectiveness of aid distribution.

3. Adequacy of the PEP Program

The PEP Program provided not only financial assistance but also training and mentoring activities in collaboration with external institutions.

Table 3. Forms of Community Support

Type of Support	Implementation
Business Capital	Assistance for productive economic activities
Skills Training	Food processing and entrepreneurship training
Business Monitoring	Continuous guidance and monitoring
Collaboration	Cooperation with institutions such as Dharma Wanita

The findings indicated that the support provided was relatively adequate, although the success of the program still depended on the beneficiaries' ability to manage their businesses.

4. Equity of the PEP Program

The equity aspect of the PEP Program can be observed through the distribution mechanism and beneficiary selection process implemented by the Social Service Office. The implementation of the program had not fully covered all communities due to budget limitations. Limited funding restricted the overall coverage of the program and the number of beneficiaries who could receive assistance. Nevertheless, beneficiary selection was conducted selectively based on predetermined eligibility criteria to ensure that assistance reached the intended target groups.

In addition, the verification process involved field observations and confirmation from RT/RW authorities to improve the accuracy of beneficiary data. As a result, although the distribution of assistance had not been fully equal, no significant social conflicts were reported by the community. Therefore, the selection mechanism was considered relatively fair and transparent.

5. Responsiveness of the PEP Program

The responsiveness of the PEP Program can be seen from the efforts made by the Social Service Office to accommodate community feedback and evaluate program implementation. The program demonstrated responsiveness through community feedback mechanisms and satisfaction surveys conducted regularly by the Social Service Office. Monitoring and evaluation activities were also carried out through direct communication with beneficiaries to identify problems and gather feedback regarding program implementation. These efforts enabled program managers to understand community needs and assess the effectiveness of the assistance provided. The findings showed that the community generally responded positively to the implementation of the PEP Program.

However, some beneficiaries considered the amount of assistance provided to be insufficient, which became the main complaint identified during the evaluation process.

6. Appropriateness of the PEP Program

The appropriateness of the PEP Program can be assessed through its objectives, policy direction, and long-term orientation toward community empowerment. The program was considered appropriate because it focused on community economic empowerment through productive business activities. The program aimed to encourage community economic independence by providing business assistance and support for productive economic activities. This objective was reflected in the policy direction, which emphasized the development of self-reliant beneficiaries. The program also implemented a graduation system in which beneficiaries who had achieved economic independence would no longer receive assistance.

Nevertheless, poverty alleviation efforts still required support from other sectors, particularly education and health programs. Therefore, the graduation policy reflected the program's orientation toward long-term independence rather than dependency.

Discussion

Based on the research findings, the Pahlawan Ekonomi Palangka Raya (PEP) Program has been analyzed using the six

policy evaluation criteria proposed by William N. Dunn (2003), namely effectiveness, efficiency, adequacy, equity, responsiveness, and appropriateness.

In terms of effectiveness, the program has shown positive results in improving community economic independence through business assistance, mentoring, and monitoring. However, the effectiveness remains partial because poverty is a multidimensional issue influenced by education, health, and employment factors. This finding is consistent with Ruth Lister's perspective that poverty cannot be understood from a single dimension alone. Furthermore, the findings support Alawiyah T. and Setiawan F. (2021), who argue that poverty alleviation requires long-term empowerment strategies that strengthen community potential rather than relying solely on short-term assistance. Therefore, although the PEP Program contributes to economic empowerment, its impact on poverty reduction remains dependent on support from other sectors.

From the efficiency perspective, the program demonstrated relatively optimal resource utilization through verification and validation mechanisms involving kelurahan authorities and RT/RW institutions. This system reduced mistargeting and improved accountability in aid distribution. The findings are in line with Bakari I. N. et al. (2025), who emphasize that data accuracy and community participation in verifying aid recipients are important factors in improving targeting precision. In addition, the collaborative verification mechanism implemented in the PEP Program reflects the importance of institutional cooperation in ensuring efficient policy implementation.

Regarding adequacy, the program has addressed community needs through business capital assistance, entrepreneurship training, and mentoring activities. Nevertheless, the adequacy of the program still depends on the beneficiaries' managerial capabilities and business sustainability. This finding supports the study of Kurnia A. et al. (2026), which found that community income improvement depends not only on financial assistance but also on innovation, commitment, and continuous support. Therefore, the provision of assistance alone is insufficient without strengthening beneficiaries' capacity to manage and develop their businesses sustainably.

In terms of equity, budget limitations prevented the program from reaching all communities equally. This finding is consistent with Wulandari D. A. and Wicaksono I. (2025), who found that budget constraints remain a major obstacle in the implementation of social assistance policies. Despite this limitation, the selection process was implemented transparently through field verification and clear eligibility criteria, which minimized social conflict among community members. This condition also reflects the importance of transparent governance as highlighted by Gemiharto I. and Rosfiantika E. (2017).

From the responsiveness aspect, the program has shown the ability to respond to community needs through monitoring activities and community satisfaction surveys. However, complaints regarding insufficient assistance indicate that public expectations have not been fully accommodated. These findings support the view of Mubaraq A. Z. et al. (2025), who emphasize that the sustainability and effectiveness of poverty alleviation programs depend on institutional capacity and continuous interaction with beneficiaries. Through monitoring and evaluation activities, the PEP Program has attempted to identify community needs and improve program implementation.

Finally, in terms of appropriateness, the PEP Program is relevant to poverty alleviation efforts because it focuses on economic empowerment and productive activities. This finding is consistent with Alawiyah T. and Setiawan F. (2021), who emphasize that strengthening community economic capacity is an important strategy for sustainable poverty alleviation. However, similar to the findings of Tarina U. and Prihastuti I. C (2024), the sustainability of program impacts remains dependent on program management and community participation. Therefore, the program cannot independently solve poverty issues and requires integration with education, health, and employment programs to achieve broader and more sustainable impacts.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to analyze the governance of the Pahlawan Ekonomi Palangka Raya (PEP) Program in poverty alleviation efforts in Palangka Raya City using William N. Dunn's policy evaluation criteria. The findings indicate that the PEP Program has generally been implemented effectively through the integration of business capital assistance, entrepreneurship training, mentoring, monitoring, and evaluation activities. The program has contributed to improving the economic independence of beneficiaries, particularly those who already possessed initial business potential. In addition, the implementation of verification and validation mechanisms involving Kelurahan authorities and RT/RW institutions has supported more targeted and accountable assistance distribution.

The contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that poverty alleviation programs at the municipal level are not only influenced by financial assistance, but also by continuous mentoring, monitoring, and institutional collaboration. The findings further show that the PEP Program functions as a community empowerment strategy that encourages beneficiaries to achieve economic independence through a graduation system rather than remaining dependent on government assistance. However, the study also found that budget limitations and the multidimensional nature of poverty remain major challenges in achieving broader program impacts.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that the PEP Program strengthen its mentoring and capacity-building activities to improve the sustainability of beneficiaries' businesses. In addition, collaboration with education, health, and employment programs should be enhanced to support more comprehensive poverty alleviation efforts. Considering the positive contribution of the program to community economic empowerment, the PEP model may also be considered for implementation in other regions beyond Palangka Raya City, with adjustments to local needs and conditions.

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