

## THE MINIMUM SERVICE STANDARDS AND SOCIAL SERVICE CHALLENGES: A CASE STUDY IN GORONTALO PROVINCE

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the implementation of the Minimum Service Standards (SPM) policy in the social sector in Gorontalo Province, highlighting the main challenges, strategies implemented, and achievements that have been achieved. Limited budget, human resources, and infrastructure are the main obstacles in the implementation of optimal basic social services. To overcome these obstacles, the local government adopted a collaborative strategy through cooperation with social institutions, such as Baznas, to cover the funding gap that was not accommodated in the Regional Revenue and Expenditure Budget.. Policy implementation is carried out in accordance with the stages determined by national regulations, starting from collecting data on needs to monitoring and evaluation. The monitoring approach uses direct coordination meetings and the use of application-based technology, which facilitates reporting and supervision. The results of the study show an increase in policy implementation, although there are still gaps that require improvement, especially in terms of funding, increasing human resource capacity, and cross-sector coordination. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the implementation strategy and commitment from various parties to ensure quality, equitable, and sustainable social services.

**Keywords:** *services, social, collaboration, evaluation, policy*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Gorontalo Province, located in the northern part of Sulawesi Island, has a strategic geographical position as well as various social challenges. As a region with a growing economic growth rate, Gorontalo still faces various fundamental issues, especially related to community welfare. One of the main issues is social services for vulnerable groups, including abandoned children, the elderly, people with disabilities, and poor families. Social services in this area have an important role in ensuring that the basic needs of the community are met, especially amidst the ever-growing socio-economic challenges (Tahir et al., 2020).

Social services in Gorontalo are part of the government's efforts to improve the quality of life of its citizens. Various facilities have been provided to support vulnerable groups, such as social institutions, shelters, and rehabilitation centers. However, the provision of these facilities still faces a number of obstacles (Abdussamad, 2021). The capacity of the facilities is often insufficient to meet the needs of the community, while the expected service quality standards have not been fully met. Several social institutions in this region, for example, are still operating with limited capacity and are not equipped with adequate facilities to provide services according to national standards (Putri et al., 2022).

The geographical challenges in Gorontalo Province also complicate the situation. Most of the region consists of rural and remote areas that are difficult to reach, so that community access to social services is uneven (Lopez & Anderson, 2020). This condition exacerbates the gap between urban and rural communities in obtaining basic services. Residents in remote areas often have difficulty in reaching social service facilities due to minimal infrastructure and long distances from service centers (Putri & Fauzi, 2021).

Limited human resources are also a major challenge in implementing social services. Social workers, who are the spearheads in providing services to the community, often face various obstacles (Abdussamad & Amala, 2016). Although the number of workers in the social sector is quite significant, many of them have not received adequate training to meet the increasingly complex needs of the community. Lack of understanding of the service standards that must be applied also hinders the effectiveness of the services provided (Suryani & Hartono, 2020).

In an effort to overcome this problem, the Gorontalo Provincial Government has established a Minimum Service Standards (SPM) policy as a reference for improving the quality of social services. This policy is designed to ensure the availability of basic services that are fair and equitable for the entire community. SPM covers various aspects, from the provision of social assistance to protection and rehabilitation services for vulnerable groups. However, the implementation of this policy is not free from various challenges, including budget constraints, lack of coordination between agencies, and minimal community participation (Sakti & Pribadi, 2018).

However, there are a number of opportunities that can be utilized to improve the quality of social services in Gorontalo. One of them is the use of information technology to increase efficiency in data collection and service delivery (Jauji & Waluyo, 2020). An integrated information system can help the government identify community needs more accurately and ensure targeted service distribution. In addition, collaboration with non-governmental organizations and the private sector can be an effective strategy in overcoming resource constraints. Social services in Gorontalo Province, with all their challenges and opportunities, reflect the complexity of efforts to improve community welfare (Pakarain & Abdussamad, 2022). The importance of synergy between the government, community, and private sector is key to achieving better results. A more focused and collaborative approach is expected to be able to answer various existing problems, so that social services can truly be felt by all levels of society. This phenomenon provides an important initial picture in understanding the context and dynamics of the implementation of Minimum Service Standards in the social sector in Gorontalo Province (Panji, 2023).

## **METHOD**

This study uses a descriptive-qualitative approach to evaluate the implementation of Minimum Service Standards (SPM) in the social sector in Gorontalo Province. This approach was chosen because it is able to provide an in-depth understanding of the actual conditions, challenges, and opportunities in the implementation of the SPM policy. Through this method, the study focuses on extracting relevant empirical data, either through in-depth interviews, direct observation, or document analysis, to understand the phenomenon holistically. The location of the study was in Gorontalo Province, covering the provincial to district/city level social services that are responsible for implementing the policy. The selection of this location was based on its relevance to the research object, considering that this region has unique dynamics in managing social services in accordance with the established standards. The data collected in this study consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews with key informants, such as social service officials, social facility managers, service officers, and beneficiaries. This approach aims to gain direct insight from the parties involved in policy implementation. In addition, secondary data was collected from official documents, such as policy implementation reports, statistical data, and related literature, to strengthen the findings from the primary data. The data collection process was carried out through three main techniques, namely in-depth interviews, direct observation of social service facilities, and documentation studies to analyze relevant official documents.

Data analysis was carried out descriptively-qualitatively, which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The data reduction stage is carried out by filtering relevant information and grouping data according to predetermined categories, such as facility availability, human resource capacity, and effectiveness of collaboration between stakeholders. Furthermore, the organized data is presented in narrative form to

facilitate the analysis process. Drawing conclusions is done based on patterns and findings that emerge from the data, resulting in a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of SPM in the social sector in Gorontalo.

To ensure data validity, this study applies triangulation techniques by comparing data obtained from various sources and methods. Information from interviews, observations, and documentation is verified with each other to ensure consistency and accuracy. In addition, the results of the analysis are reconfirmed to informants to obtain further validation. With this approach, the study is expected to be able to provide a comprehensive picture of the implementation of SPM, as well as identify areas that require further attention in order to improve the quality of social services in Gorontalo Province.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The implementation of the Minimum Service Standards (SPM) policy in the social sector in Gorontalo Province is a strategic step aimed at improving the quality of public services and community welfare, especially vulnerable groups. However, the implementation of this policy is not free from various challenges, ranging from budget aspects to cross-sectoral collaboration. In the context of social services, this policy is very important considering the increasing need for quality basic services, especially in areas with limited infrastructure. Gorontalo Province, as one of the regions in Indonesia that still faces social and economic disparities, is a relevant location to study the implementation of this policy.

### **1. Policy Issues and Problems**

The biggest challenge in implementing the Minimum Service Standards (MSS) policy in the social sector is the complexity that arises from various limitations, both in terms of budget, human resources (HR), and infrastructure. Limited budgets are often the main obstacle for local governments, especially in districts and cities, in providing adequate social services. Regions with minimal budget allocations face difficulties in meeting basic service needs such as providing social assistance for the elderly, orphans, people with disabilities, or poor people who are the main targets of the policy. As a result, the implementation of the MSS policy in the social sector is often slow and uneven, especially in remote areas that have greater logistical challenges.

Infrastructure inequality is also a significant obstacle in implementing this policy. Many remote areas in Gorontalo Province are difficult to reach due to poor road access or a lack of public facilities that support the provision of social services. The unavailability of facilities and infrastructure such as social service offices, rehabilitation centers, or temporary shelters for disaster victims makes the implementation of MSS unable to be carried out optimally. In this context, the government often has to rely on cooperation with community organizations or third parties to reach areas that are difficult to access. The gap in the quality of social services between regions is also a very prominent issue. Several regions in Gorontalo Province have better capacity in providing social services compared to other regions. This creates inequality,

where people in certain regions receive better quality services, while people in other regions do not receive the same standard of service. This condition is rooted in differences in budget capacity, HR competency, and infrastructure available in each region.

Dependence on third parties, such as private institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or community social institutions, is also a challenge in itself. Although this cooperation scheme is often a solution to overcome budget and HR limitations, excessive dependence on third parties can be a risk if the partner being invited to collaborate is unable to fulfill long-term commitments. When partner institutions experience financial or operational constraints, the impact is directly felt by the community that relies on these social services.

Meanwhile, suboptimal cross-sectoral collaboration also worsens the situation. Social policies often require close coordination between various parties, including government agencies, community organizations, and the private sector. Unfortunately, this coordination is often hampered by complicated bureaucracy or lack of synergy between institutions. As a result, many social programs run separately without adequate integration, making it difficult to achieve the overall objectives of the SPM policy in the social sector. To overcome these challenges, a strategic approach is needed that focuses on strengthening cross-sectoral coordination, improving human resource competencies, and more effective budget management. In addition, local governments also need to develop innovations in policy implementation, such as utilizing digital technology to improve the efficiency of social services or strengthening partnerships with local institutions that have adequate capacity. By adopting a more inclusive and integrated approach, the implementation of the SPM policy in the social sector is expected to run better and have a significant impact on the welfare of the Gorontalo community.

## **2. The Solutions to Solve Problems**

To overcome these challenges, a strategic approach involving all stakeholders is needed. One of the main solutions is to increase budget allocation for social services through needs-based planning. Local governments must be able to accurately map community needs so that budget allocations can be focused on truly urgent priorities. The use of digital technology is also key to increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of policy implementation. By using an integrated information system, the government can accelerate the data collection process, monitor program implementation, and increase transparency in budget management.

Increasing human resource capacity is also very important. The government needs to provide ongoing training for social service officers to improve their competence. Thus, officers can provide more professional services that are in accordance with community needs. In addition, cross-sectoral collaboration must be strengthened through the establishment of a coordination forum involving various parties, including local governments, community organizations, academics, and the private sector. This forum can be a forum to align programs and ensure synergy in policy implementation.

### **3. Background and Policy Formulation**

The background to the formulation of this policy is based on the urgent need to provide equitable and quality social security for the people of Gorontalo Province. As a region that still faces challenges in terms of social welfare, Gorontalo needs a policy that can answer local needs. This policy is designed to provide clear guidance to local governments in providing effective and efficient social services. The formulation process involves various parties, including local governments, academics, community organizations, and the private sector, with the aim of creating policies that are inclusive and relevant to local conditions.

In formulating the policy, the local government also pays attention to the principles of transparency and public participation. This is done to ensure that the resulting policy is not only oriented towards regulation, but also on real results that can be felt by the community. The policy document is prepared based on empirical data and input from various parties, so that this policy has a strong foundation for implementation.

### **4. Policy Maker Profile**

Policy makers have a very important role in determining the success of this policy. They consist of individuals with diverse backgrounds, ranging from academics, practitioners, to local government officials who have competence in the field of social welfare. These policy makers are also involved in various national and international organizations that provide them with additional insights to enrich local policies. Their competencies include a deep understanding of regulations, managerial skills, and expertise in policy analysis.

In addition to individual competencies, policy makers also have an interest in ensuring that the resulting policies can provide maximum benefits to the community. They are responsible for integrating input from various parties, designing effective implementation strategies, and ensuring that these policies can be implemented sustainably.

### **5. Implementation**

The implementation of the Minimum Service Standards (SPM) policy in the social sector is carried out through a structured and comprehensive strategy. This strategy includes three main stages, namely planning, implementation, and evaluation, all of which are designed to ensure that the policy can be implemented effectively and on target. In the planning stage, the local government prepares a program based on data on community needs, such as the number of service recipients, infrastructure conditions, and available human resources (HR). This planning document is integrated into the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD) and the Regional Government Work Plan (RKPD), which includes programs, implementation schedules, and budget allocations.

At the implementation stage, the implementation strategy focuses on the efficiency of resource allocation, empowerment of HR, and development and optimization of supporting infrastructure. Given the limited budget and resources in many regions, local governments often adopt a collaborative approach with community social institutions, such as Baznas, to overcome financing gaps. This collaboration allows regions to continue to provide basic social

services, even with limited resources. In addition, programs such as "TAGANA Masuk Sekolah" and "Kampung Siaga Bencana" are examples of innovative efforts to increase public awareness and strengthen social resilience at the local level.

Participatory approaches are also an important component in the process of implementing this policy. Local governments provide space for the public to provide input, both through discussion forums and public complaint mechanisms. Public participation not only helps increase transparency, but also strengthens supervision of policy implementation. By involving the public, the government can better understand the needs in the field, so that the programs designed are more relevant and impactful.

Monitoring and evaluation are equally important stages in policy implementation. Monitoring is carried out periodically to monitor program implementation according to the indicators that have been set. Local governments, for example, use the e-SPM Bina Bangda application from the Ministry of Home Affairs to collect data in real time and monitor the progress of SPM implementation in the social sector. The data collected covers various aspects, from the availability of goods and services to the sustainability of programs in the field.

Meanwhile, evaluation is used to identify obstacles that arise during policy implementation as well as opportunities for improvement. For example, budget and human resource limitations are often the main obstacles that affect policy achievements, so evaluations can provide strategic recommendations to overcome these obstacles. Evaluation results are also used as a basis for policy adjustments, ensuring flexibility in dealing with the dynamics of changing community needs.

With this integrated approach, local governments can optimize the implementation of SPM policies in the social sector despite facing various limitations. Strategies that are oriented towards resource efficiency, community participation, and continuous monitoring and evaluation allow this policy to have a more significant impact on community welfare. This is in line with the main objective of the SPM policy, which is to ensure that every individual has equal access to quality basic social services, without exception.

## **6. Policy Output**

The output of this policy can be measured from the benefits felt by the community. This policy has succeeded in increasing access to social services for vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, orphans, and people with disabilities. The efficiency of the policy is reflected in the management of resources that are more focused on priority needs, while its effectiveness can be seen from the increase in the achievement of SPM indicators each year. However, there are still challenges in terms of equalizing the benefits of the policy, especially in remote areas where infrastructure and resources are still limited.

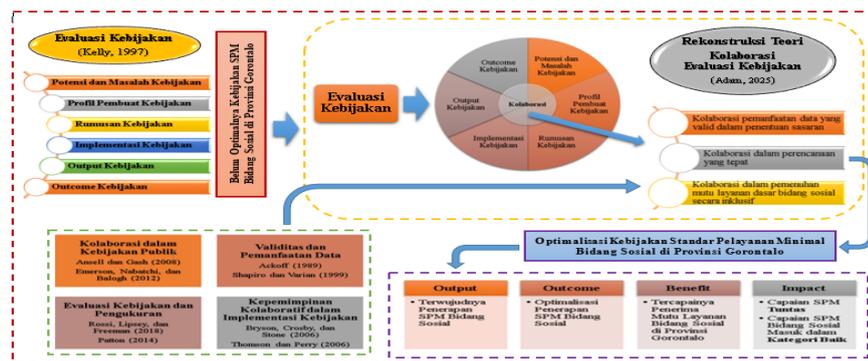
In addition to direct benefits for the community, this policy also has a positive impact on local governments. With this policy, the government can strengthen institutional capacity and increase their legitimacy as responsible social service providers.

## 7. Policy Outcome

The outcome of this policy includes long-term impacts for the government and society. For the government, this policy helps improve institutional capacity in providing social services. In addition, this policy also strengthens the legitimacy of the government as an institution that is responsive to the needs of the community. For the community, this policy has a positive impact in the form of increasing social welfare and inclusiveness in access to services. Vulnerable groups who previously had difficulty obtaining services are now beginning to feel the benefits of this policy, thus creating a more just and equal society.

Overall, the Minimum Service Standards policy in the social sector in Gorontalo Province has shown various achievements, although it still faces significant challenges. By utilizing technology, increasing human resource capacity, and strengthening cross-sectoral collaboration, this policy has the potential to have a greater impact on improving community welfare. In the long term, the success of implementing this policy will depend heavily on the commitment of all parties to work together and innovate in overcoming the various challenges that exist.

The researcher formulated this novelty research by adding one important point, namely Collaboration, Theory development by adding collaboration indicators to the policy evaluation dimension is a very relevant and strategic step, especially in the context of the Minimum Service Standards (SPM) in the Social Sector in Gorontalo Province. Policy evaluation has an important role in assessing the effectiveness, efficiency, and relevance of a policy, as well as ensuring that policy objectives can be achieved in accordance with established standards. Collaboration indicators are key elements in the evaluation dimension because of the ability of collaboration to strengthen policy analysis, mitigate obstacles in implementation, and provide solutions based on valid data.



Picture 1. The research novelty

Source : dissertation documentation

The main focus on the policy implementation dimension is to ensure that policy implementation runs according to predetermined plans, regulations, and procedures. However, in the evaluation process, the main emphasis lies on an in-depth analysis of policy

outcomes, including how effectively the policy addresses community needs and how improvement efforts can be made based on evaluation findings. This is where collaboration indicators play a strategic role.

## CONCLUSION

The Minimum Service Standards (SPM) policy in the social sector in Gorontalo Province is a strategic effort to address the basic needs of the community for quality and equitable social services. This policy reflects the commitment of the local government to improve the service system that was previously less than optimal, by paying special attention to vulnerable groups such as the elderly, orphans, and people with disabilities. In its implementation, this policy has provided real benefits, although challenges such as budget constraints, infrastructure inequality, and lack of cross-sectoral coordination are still obstacles that need to be overcome.

The achievement of this policy cannot be separated from the strategic role of policy makers and implementers at the local level, who continue to strive to improve the quality of services through innovative and collaborative approaches. Provision of adequate resources, increasing the competence of officers, and implementing digital technology are concrete steps in strengthening the effectiveness of the policy. Consistent monitoring and evaluation are also key elements to ensure that this policy remains relevant to the needs of a dynamic community.

The success of this policy is ultimately measured by its impact on improving the social welfare of the community. Despite many challenges, this policy has shown great potential in creating more inclusive, equitable, and efficient social services. In the future, a stronger commitment is needed from all parties, both government, society, and the private sector, to jointly overcome existing obstacles and continue to optimize policy implementation. Thus, the SPM policy in the social sector in Gorontalo Province is not only an administrative instrument, but also a catalyst for change towards a more prosperous, just, and competitive society. Sustainable and participatory implementation will be the key to ensuring that this policy truly provides maximum benefits for all levels of society.

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