

The SEKOPER Program: Informal Women's School Implemented by the PUG–PHA Division, DP3APPKB Surabaya City

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Abstract: This study explores the implementation of the SEKOPER (Sekolah Perempuan Informal) program by the Department of Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, Population Control, and Family Planning (DP3APPKB) of Surabaya City. Employing a qualitative observational approach based on internship experience, the research focused on program delivery in multiple subdistricts between April and June 2025. Observational data were supported by informal interviews and document reviews, with analysis guided by the Street-Level Bureaucracy theory (Tummers & Bekkers, 2021) and Social Capital theory (Putnam, 2020; Woolcock & Narayan, 2022). Findings indicate that the participatory and contextual design of the SEKOPER program effectively empowers women heads of households from underprivileged backgrounds through practical training such as cooking and beauty classes. These initiatives not only build individual capacity but also create sustainable economic opportunities. The program's success is reinforced by inclusive social interactions between organizers and participants, along with strong support from local government. However, institutional strengthening and program expansion are recommended to enhance impact and sustainability. This research contributes to discussions on micro-level policy adaptation and the role of social capital in the success of community empowerment programs.

Keywords: women's empowerment, street-level bureaucracy, social capital, community-based program, qualitative observation

1 INTRODUCTION

The improvement of human resource quality is widely recognized as a crucial factor in promoting sustainable and inclusive development (UNDP, 2021). Women, who represent half of Indonesia's population, hold significant potential to contribute not only within the domestic sphere but also across social, economic, and political sectors. Nevertheless, studies and statistical reports indicate that gender disparities persist in many regions. For instance, according to the Surabaya City Statistics Agency (BPS Kota Surabaya, 2023), the female labor force participation rate is only 59.48%, significantly lower than the male rate of 81.92%. Additionally, the ratio of female workers to the working-age population stands at just 54.13%, illustrating limited access to employment opportunities for women. These findings are supported by previous research showing that women are more vulnerable to poverty, unequal caregiving roles, and gender-based violence, particularly at the grassroots level (UN Women, 2022; Jones et al., 2019). To tackle such inequality, the Indonesian government introduced gender mainstreaming (PUG) through Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 2000 and reinforced it via Regulation of the Minister for Women Empowerment and Child Protection No. 13 of 2021. At the local level, Surabaya's Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD 2021–2026) specifically prioritizes the improvement of women's quality of life (Pemkot Surabaya, 2021), aligning with broader goals for equitable development.

To support the realization of gender mainstreaming at the regional level, the Surabaya City Government through the DP3APPKB and its Division of Gender Mainstreaming and Fulfillment of Children's Rights (PUG–PHA) has implemented the SEKOPER (Informal Women's School) program. This initiative serves as a community-based, non-formal educational model aimed at increasing women's socio-economic and psychological literacy. The curriculum addresses topics relevant to women's everyday lives, such as family health, caregiving roles, gender equality within households, and economic empowerment for female heads of poor and near-poor families registered in GAMIS. This manuscript is based on the author's observations and internship experience within the PUG–PHA Division of DP3APPKB Surabaya. The field experience provided insights into the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the SEKOPER

program. The methodology and observations are elaborated further in the materials and methods section, while the practical findings are presented in the results and discussion. This work aims to document and reflect on the implementation process of gender mainstreaming at the city level and offer a practical contribution to strengthening inclusive policy practices.

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a qualitative observational approach grounded in internship experience at the Division of Gender Mainstreaming and Fulfillment of Children's Rights (PUG-PHA), under the DP3APPKB of Surabaya City. The main focus of observation was the implementation of the SEKOPER (Informal Women's School) program, which was carried out from April to June 2025 across several subdistricts in Surabaya. The interns were actively involved in all stages of the program, including initial data preparation, participant selection, logistical planning, and direct involvement in the program's field activities. Data collection was conducted primarily through non-participant observation, supported by informal interviews with both program participants and organizers. Informants were selected purposively, focusing on highly engaged participants and key figures such as the head of the Gender Mainstreaming team.

In analyzing the data, this study applied two main theoretical frameworks. First, the Street-Level Bureaucracy theory as proposed by Tummers and Bekkers (2021) was used to understand the discretion exercised by field-level actors in adapting formal policy frameworks to local realities. Second, the Social Capital Theory, as introduced by Putnam (2020) and further developed by Woolcock and Narayan (2022), provided a lens through which to examine the role of trust, social networks, and collective norms in the success and sustainability of empowerment programs like SEKOPER. These frameworks serve to contextualize how top-down policies can be made impactful through grassroots-level adaptation and the mobilization of social cohesion. The reflections and analysis presented in this study are based on triangulated qualitative data from observation, informal interviews, and internal documentation gathered during the internship period.

3 RESULTS

The implementation of the SEKOPER (Informal Women's School) program from April to June 2025 in Surabaya demonstrated several encouraging outcomes based on observational data and participant feedback. As a program initiated under the supervision of the Gender Mainstreaming Team (PUG) at DP3APPKB Surabaya, SEKOPER was organized monthly in three to four neighboring subdistricts, with each session running for two consecutive days. The program targeted women from GAMIS-registered families particularly single mothers or female heads of households although any woman from poor or near-poor households with Surabaya ID was eligible. The training was structured to be both educational and practical. On the first day, participants attended a session on gender equality, delivered by Ms. One Widyawati, S.KM., M.Kes., followed by a cooking class developed in collaboration with Rotary and Sages Academic. This session not only introduced culinary techniques but also trained participants in product packaging suitable for commercial sale. On the second day, participants joined a beauty class conducted in partnership with Spectra by L'Oréal, focusing on everyday makeup application with the aim of boosting self-confidence and offering economic potential through beauty services.

Field observations revealed a high level of enthusiasm among participants, indicated by their punctual attendance many arrived 30 minutes early and their active participation during sessions. The sessions particularly attracted attention on the second day, when the beauty class was held. Interviews with participants further supported these observations, with respondents describing the program as highly beneficial and directly relevant to their needs. Many participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity, stating that SEKOPER helped them not only acquire practical skills but also improve their self-esteem and motivation. Several women also voiced hopes for expanded training in areas such as sewing, embroidery, and other productive crafts, suggesting that the program had sparked broader aspirations for economic self-reliance.

The involvement of the Surabaya Mayor, who initiated and continues to monitor the program, significantly contributed to its legitimacy and visibility. Internally, the program succeeded in fostering a participatory, non-hierarchical atmosphere where participants felt heard and supported. These dynamics are in line with the theoretical framework of **Street-Level Bureaucracy**, where implementers at the ground level adapt rigid policies to local realities using discretionary decision-making. In the context of SEKOPER, such discretion was exercised in selecting training topics that matched participants' socioeconomic potential. At the same time, the success of the program also aligns with **Social Capital Theory**, as evidenced by the formation of trust, collective motivation, and solidarity among participants and between them and the organizers. This trust was reflected in the way participants engaged with the facilitators and with each other, creating a social environment conducive to learning and growth.

While the program showed strong short-term outcomes, there remains room for improvement, particularly regarding long-term sustainability. To build on the momentum, it is recommended that follow-up mechanisms be established such as alumni networks, entrepreneurship forums, or skill-based cooperatives. Expanding the training modules beyond cooking and makeup to include other forms of income-generating skills could also address the diverse aspirations voiced by participants. Furthermore, institutionalizing the social networks formed during the program into formal support systems would enhance the durability of the program's impact. Overall, the SEKOPER program in Surabaya demonstrates how the interplay between grassroots-level policy implementers and empowered communities can lead to meaningful, context-sensitive outcomes. The success of the program lies not only in its design but also in the relational strength between implementers and participants. Therefore, sustaining this impact requires deliberate efforts to support implementer discretion, expand program content, and formalize social capital into long-term community infrastructure.

4 DISCUSSIONS

The implementation of the SEKOPER (Informal Women's School) program by the DP3APPKB of Surabaya City highlights a notable example of how participatory and context-specific public policy can deliver tangible social and economic impacts, especially for marginalized groups such as women-headed households from low-income communities. This study observed that practical trainings like cooking and beauty classes significantly enhanced the individual capacity of participants while simultaneously opening up sustainable economic opportunities. These findings align with previous research on community-based women empowerment programs that emphasize skill-building as a means to achieve socio-economic independence.

Compared to similar programs in other urban settings, SEKOPER demonstrates a stronger integration between field implementation and local government support, which strengthens its legitimacy and continuity. However, it also shares limitations common in localized social programs such as limited institutional capacity and insufficient breadth of training. The Street-Level Bureaucracy theory helps explain how frontline implementers adapt macro-level policies to local realities, while Social Capital theory supports the idea that open, reciprocal relationships among stakeholders are key to the program's success.

Despite its promising outcomes, the program would benefit from broader training options tailored to participant aspirations (e.g., sewing, digital literacy), as well as consistent monitoring and evaluation to ensure long-term impact. Furthermore, the role of external stakeholders such as universities could be expanded through research collaboration and structured internship programs, which would not only enhance program development but also contribute to student learning. For future interns, understanding institutional context, building professional relationships, and taking initiative beyond technical tasks are essential strategies for maximizing contribution and learning.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The SEKOPER program by DP3APPKB Surabaya has proven to be an impactful initiative for empowering women from underprivileged backgrounds through practical and relevant skill-based training. Its effectiveness is supported by strong social engagement between implementers and participants, as well as government backing. Theories of Street-Level Bureaucracy and Social Capital help to explain the success of the program in adapting policies to local needs and fostering trust-based collaboration. However, to achieve a truly ideal model, institutional reinforcement and program expansion are necessary to ensure broader reach and long-term sustainability.

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