

| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Beyond Institutional Collaboration: Collaborative Governance and its Limits in Socio-economic Empowerment Programs for Vulnerable Woman

Nur Wahdatul Chilmy¹, Prof. Dr. Hadi Prayitno, M.Kes.², Drs. Supranoto, M.Si., Ph.D.³ and Dr. Linda Dwi Eriyanti, S.Sos., M.A.⁴

¹²³⁴*Faculty of Social and Politic Sciences, FISIP UNEJ*

Corresponding Author: Nur Wahdatul Chilmy, **E-mail:** chilmy.nur@gmail.com

| ABSTRACT

The Women's socioeconomic vulnerability remains a persistent policy challenge in decentralized governance contexts, requiring governance approaches that extend beyond sectoral and institutional boundaries. This study examines how collaborative governance is structured and enacted in the empowerment of Perempuan Rawan Sosial Ekonomi (PRSE) in Kabupaten Jember, Indonesia, and assesses its implications for women's socioeconomic empowerment outcomes. Employing a qualitative phenomenological design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, non-participant observation, and document analysis involving key institutional actors and PRSE beneficiaries. Data were analyzed using an interactive model of qualitative analysis. The findings reveal that collaborative governance in PRSE empowerment has been formally established through multi-actor involvement but remains substantively limited. Collaboration is predominantly government-led, with asymmetric power relations and procedural participation by beneficiaries. While empowerment initiatives improve access to skills training, financial literacy, and short-term economic resilience, these outcomes are weakly institutionalized and lack sustainability due to fragmented coordination and limited beneficiary involvement in decision-making processes. This study contributes to collaborative governance and gender empowerment literature by demonstrating that institutional collaboration alone is insufficient to produce transformative empowerment outcomes. Meaningful empowerment requires inclusive governance mechanisms, substantive power-sharing, and integrated policy coordination. Practically, the findings highlight the need for participatory governance reforms and sustainability-oriented empowerment strategies to enhance the long-term socioeconomic autonomy of vulnerable women. The study offers empirical insights for policymakers and scholars concerned with gender-responsive governance and social policy implementation in developing-country contexts.

| KEYWORDS

Women's empowerment; Woman Socioeconomic vulnerability; PRSE; Local Governance

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Women's socioeconomic vulnerability remains a persistent global development challenge, particularly in developing countries where structural inequalities, limited access to resources, and entrenched patriarchal norms intersect to reinforce poverty cycles. Women experiencing social and economic vulnerability often face restricted access to education, healthcare, decent employment, and legal protection, which systematically constrains their social mobility and economic independence (Suprapti et al., 2021; Putra & Amran, 2023). International data indicate that women constitute nearly 70% of the world's poor, a phenomenon widely conceptualized as the *feminization of poverty*, highlighting gendered disparities in access to development opportunities (Rao, 2013; Chant, 2012). These conditions underscore the necessity of governance approaches that move beyond sectoral interventions toward more inclusive and integrative policy frameworks.

In Indonesia, women classified as *Perempuan Rawan Sosial Ekonomi* (PRSE) represent a particularly marginalized group within the broader category of *Penyandang Masalah Kesejahteraan Sosial* (PMKS), as regulated under national social welfare policies (Ministry of Social Affairs Regulation No. 8/2012). PRSE are commonly female heads of households who experience multidimensional deprivation due to poverty, limited education, unstable employment, and social vulnerability. Empirical evidence from Kabupaten Jember reveals that despite abundant local resources, poverty levels remain relatively high, with women disproportionately affected, especially those assuming dual productive and reproductive roles (BPS, 2023). However, existing policy responses tend to be fragmented, institutionally siloed, and insufficiently coordinated across stakeholders.

Previous studies emphasize that poverty alleviation and women's empowerment programs

often fail to achieve sustainable outcomes due to weak inter-organizational coordination, limited stakeholder participation, and the dominance of top-down bureaucratic approaches (Suyanto & Pudjianto, 2015; Warih, 2017). While the concept of *collaborative governance* has gained traction as an alternative governance model that emphasizes shared decision-making, mutual trust, and cross-sectoral collaboration (Ansell & Gash, 2007), empirical research examining its concrete implementation in women-focused social empowerment programs at the local level remains limited. In particular, there is a lack of in-depth qualitative analysis on how collaborative governance operates in practice, including the roles, interactions, and power dynamics among government agencies, financial institutions, and community actors.

This study aims to analyze the collaborative governance model implemented in the empowerment of PRSE in Kabupaten Jember by examining institutional collaboration among the Social Affairs Office, the Cooperative and Microenterprise Office, and the Financial Services Authority (OJK). Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, the research seeks to explore how collaborative processes are formed, the factors that support or hinder inter-agency collaboration, and the extent to which such collaboration contributes to enhancing women's economic independence, participation, and social resilience. The study specifically focuses on governance mechanisms, stakeholder roles, and institutional alignment within the PRSE empowerment program.

The contribution of this article lies in advancing empirical understanding of collaborative governance in the context of gender-responsive social policy implementation at the local level. By situating PRSE empowerment within a collaborative governance framework, this study enriches public administration and governance literature with context-specific insights from Indonesia, while offering practical policy implications for designing more inclusive, integrated, and sustainable women's empowerment programs. The findings are expected to inform policymakers, practitioners, and scholars seeking to strengthen collaborative governance arrangements to address complex social vulnerabilities affecting women in developing regions.

Literature Review

The study of women's socioeconomic vulnerability and empowerment is grounded in multidisciplinary theoretical traditions encompassing poverty theory, governance theory, gender studies, and public policy analysis. Poverty is widely conceptualized as a multidimensional phenomenon that extends beyond income deprivation to include limited access to education, health services, employment, and political participation (Suharto, 2005; Sen in Todaro & Smith, 2011). From a structural perspective, poverty is reinforced by unequal access to human and physical capital, discriminatory labor markets, and weak institutional support systems (Dowling & Valenzuela, 2003). These conditions disproportionately affect women, particularly female heads of households, who experience compounded disadvantages due to gendered social norms and economic marginalization.

Governance theory provides a critical framework for understanding how public problems such as women's socioeconomic vulnerability are addressed through institutional arrangements. Governance is no longer perceived as a state-centric process but as a networked system involving the interaction of government, private sector, and civil society actors (Sedarmayanti, 2003; Ulum & Ngindana, 2017). The "hollowing out of the state" perspective emphasizes the declining dominance of the state and the increasing reliance on inter-organizational networks, negotiation, and trust-based coordination to deliver public value (Rhodes in Levi-Faur, 2011; Sørensen & Torfing in Levi-Faur, 2011). This shift has given rise to participatory, democratic, and collaborative governance models aimed at addressing complex and cross-sectoral social problems.

Within this broader governance paradigm, collaborative governance represents a middle-range theory that emphasizes joint decision-making processes involving public agencies and non-state actors in formally structured forums (Ansell & Gash,

2007). Collaborative governance is characterized by shared authority, consensus-oriented decision-making, and collective responsibility for policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation (Davies & White, 2012; Emerson et al., 2012). Prior studies highlight that collaborative governance is particularly effective in addressing "wicked problems" such as poverty and gender inequality, which require coordinated action across institutional boundaries (Mitchell & Shortell, 2000; Gerlak & Heikkila, 2006). Leadership, trust-building, and sustained stakeholder engagement are identified as critical success factors within collaborative arrangements (Weber, 2009; Page, 2010).

Gender and women's empowerment theories further inform this study by elucidating the structural roots of women's vulnerability. The feminization of poverty thesis underscores the growing concentration of poverty among women due to patriarchal norms, unequal household power relations, and limited access to productive resources (Chant, 2012; Abercrombie & Hastings, 2016). Longwe's empowerment framework conceptualizes women's empowerment as a progression from welfare and access to participation, control, and ultimately equality (Longwe, 1991), while the APKN framework (Access, Participation, Control, and Benefits) emphasizes women's agency within development processes (Nugroho, 2017). These frameworks stress that empowerment initiatives must address both material and non-material dimensions of inequality to achieve sustainable outcomes.

Empirical studies provide important insights into the implementation of empowerment and collaborative governance initiatives. Putri and Darwis (2015), using a qualitative case study approach, demonstrate that women-led microenterprises can become primary household income sources when supported by training and institutional facilitation. Izzalqurny et al. (2022), employing mixed methods, find that community-based empowerment programs improve women's skills and confidence but often lack sustainability due to weak institutional coordination. Suprapti et al. (2021) highlight that fragmented policy implementation and limited stakeholder integration reduce the effectiveness of social protection programs for vulnerable women. Ansell and Gash (2007), through a comparative analysis of collaborative governance cases, show that inclusive participation and trust-building significantly influence collaborative outcomes. Meanwhile, Warih (2017) emphasizes that empowerment initiatives driven solely by external actors tend to foster dependency rather than self-reliance among marginalized communities.

Despite these contributions, several gaps remain in the existing literature. Theoretically, many studies examine collaborative governance or women's empowerment in isolation, with limited integration of governance frameworks and gender-responsive policy analysis. Empirically, there is a lack of in-depth qualitative research that explores how collaborative governance operates at the local level in empowering socioeconomically vulnerable women, particularly within decentralized governance contexts such as Indonesia. Existing studies often focus on program outcomes rather than the governance processes, inter-institutional dynamics, and contextual constraints that shape those outcomes.

In conclusion, the literature indicates that women's socioeconomic empowerment requires governance arrangements that are inclusive, coordinated, and sensitive to studies highlight that collaborative governance is particularly effective in addressing "wicked problems" such as poverty and gender inequality, which require coordinated action across institutional boundaries (Mitchell & Shortell, 2000; Gerlak & Heikkila, 2006). Leadership, trust-building, and sustained stakeholder engagement are identified as critical success factors within collaborative arrangements (Weber, 2009; Page, 2010).

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In conclusion, the literature indicates that women's socioeconomic empowerment requires governance arrangements that are inclusive, coordinated, and sensitive was determined through theoretical saturation, whereby data collection continued until no new substantive insights emerged.

Data were collected using multiple qualitative techniques to ensure depth and triangulation.

Primary data were obtained through non-participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). Observations focused on program implementation processes and inter-agency interactions. Interviews were conducted flexibly using open-ended guiding questions to elicit detailed narratives regarding roles, collaboration mechanisms, and perceived challenges (Sugiyono, 2018). FGDs, comprising 5–10 participants, were used to capture shared meanings and validate individual accounts

within group dynamics. Secondary data were gathered through document analysis, including policy documents, program reports, institutional archives, and official statistics related to PRSE empowerment.

Researcher served as the primary instrument of data collection, supported by interview guides, observation protocols, and document review matrices. Analytical indicators were derived from the collaborative governance framework (Ansell & Gash, 2007), including participation, institutional roles, coordination mechanisms, trust-building, and decision-making processes, as well as women's empowerment dimensions such as access, participation, control, and benefits. Data credibility was ensured through methodological, source, and theoretical triangulation to minimize interpretive bias and enhance analytical rigor.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), conducted concurrently with data collection. The analytical process involved data condensation through coding and categorization, data display using matrices and thematic charts, and conclusion drawing through iterative pattern matching and verification. This cyclical process enabled the identification of dominant governance patterns, enabling factors, and structural constraints shaping PRSE empowerment. Qualitative data management and visualization were supported by analytical software to facilitate systematic coding and interpretation.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to established ethical standards for qualitative social research. Prior to data collection, all participants were informed about the objectives, procedures, and voluntary nature of the study. Informed consent was obtained from each informant before interviews, observations, and focus group discussions were conducted. Participants were assured that their involvement was entirely voluntary and that they retained the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences.

To protect participants' privacy and confidentiality, all personal identifiers were anonymized during data transcription, analysis, and reporting. Pseudonyms and institutional role descriptions were used in place of real names to prevent identification of individual informants or specific beneficiaries. Sensitive information related to personal experiences, socioeconomic conditions, and institutional dynamics was handled with strict confidentiality and used solely for academic purposes.

Given the vulnerability of PRSE participants, particular attention was paid to minimizing potential psychological or social harm. Interviews and discussions were conducted in safe and respectful environments, allowing participants to express their experiences freely without coercion. The researcher maintained reflexivity throughout the research process to reduce interpretive bias and ensure that participants' perspectives were represented accurately and ethically.

Results

The analysis reveals that the empowerment of Perempuan Rawan Sosial Ekonomi (PRSE) in Kabupaten Jember is implemented through a collaborative governance arrangement involving multiple public institutions and community actors. The primary actors include the Social Affairs Office as the leading sector, the Cooperative and Microenterprise Office (Diskopum), the Financial Services Authority (OJK), field facilitators, and PRSE beneficiary groups. Empirical findings indicate that collaboration is structured around program coordination, capacity-building activities, and access to microeconomic resources, particularly skills training and financial literacy.

Figure 1. Collaborative Governance Framework in PRSE Empowerment

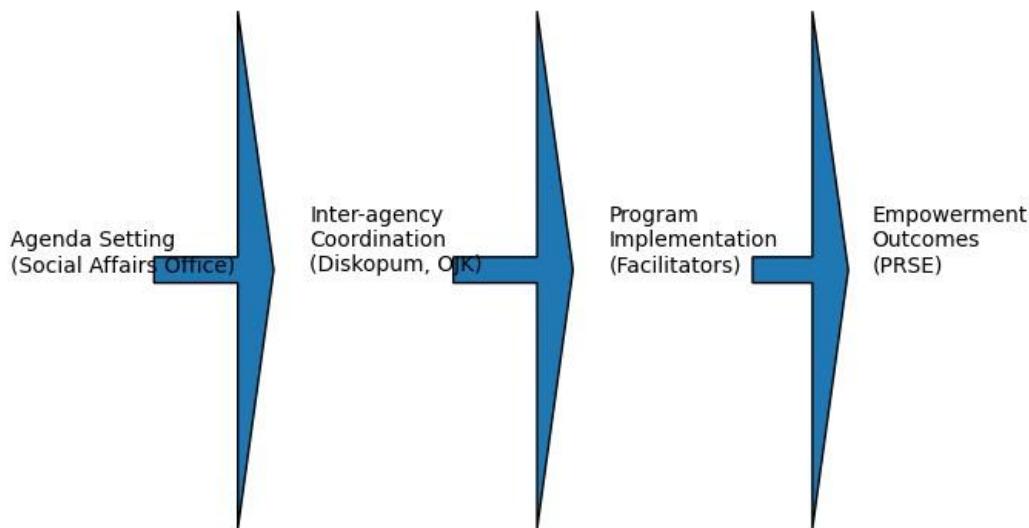


Figure 1. illustrates the collaborative governance framework underlying PRSE empowerment, highlighting the sequential interaction between agenda setting, inter-agency coordination, implementation, and empowerment outcomes.

The first key finding concerns the pattern of stakeholder participation. Institutional actors were actively involved during program initiation and implementation stages, particularly in beneficiary identification, training delivery, and resource facilitation. However, participation was largely procedural and remained dominated by government agencies, while non-state actors and PRSE participants had limited influence over strategic decision-making. This indicates a partial form of collaboration rather than fully shared governance.

The second finding relates to coordination and inter-agency interaction. Data show that coordination among institutions was primarily informal and project-based, relying on ad hoc meetings and personal communication rather than standardized coordination mechanisms. While this flexibility facilitated short-term program execution, it also resulted in overlapping roles, inconsistent program continuity, and limited integration between social protection and economic empowerment components.

The third finding highlights the outcomes of empowerment initiatives for PRSE participants. Beneficiaries reported increased access to skills training, small-scale income-generating activities, and basic financial knowledge. These outcomes contributed to short-term improvements in economic resilience and self-confidence. Nevertheless, the sustainability of empowerment outcomes remained fragile, as many participants continued to depend on institutional assistance and lacked market access, capital accumulation, and long-term mentoring.

Figure 2. Stakeholder Interaction Network in PRSE Empowerment

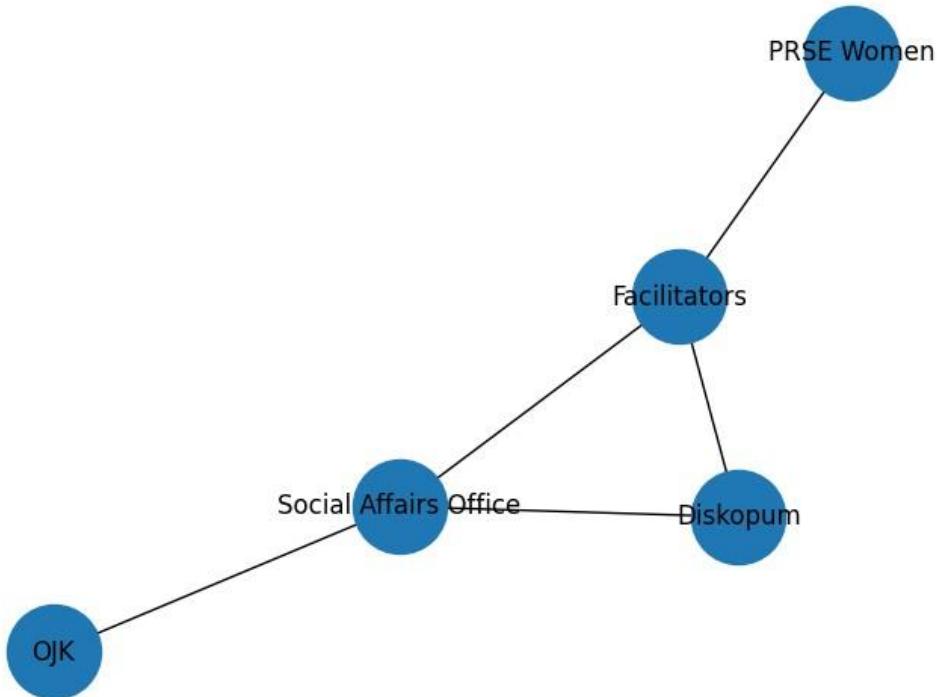


Figure 2 depicts the interaction network among key stakeholders, indicating the central role of government agencies and the peripheral position of PRSE beneficiaries. Figure 2 depicts the interaction network among key stakeholders, indicating the central role of government agencies and the peripheral position of PRSE beneficiaries.

Discussion

The findings illustrate that collaborative governance in PRSE empowerment operates within a constrained institutional context, reflecting key propositions of collaborative governance theory. According to Ansell and Gash (2007), effective collaboration requires inclusive participation, shared decision-making authority, and sustained interaction among stakeholders. The dominance of government actors observed in this study suggests that collaboration remains largely instrumental, supporting Sørensen and Torfing's argument that many governance networks function as extensions of hierarchical control rather than genuinely horizontal partnerships (Levi-Faur, 2011).

Figure 3. Changes in PRSE Empowerment Outcomes

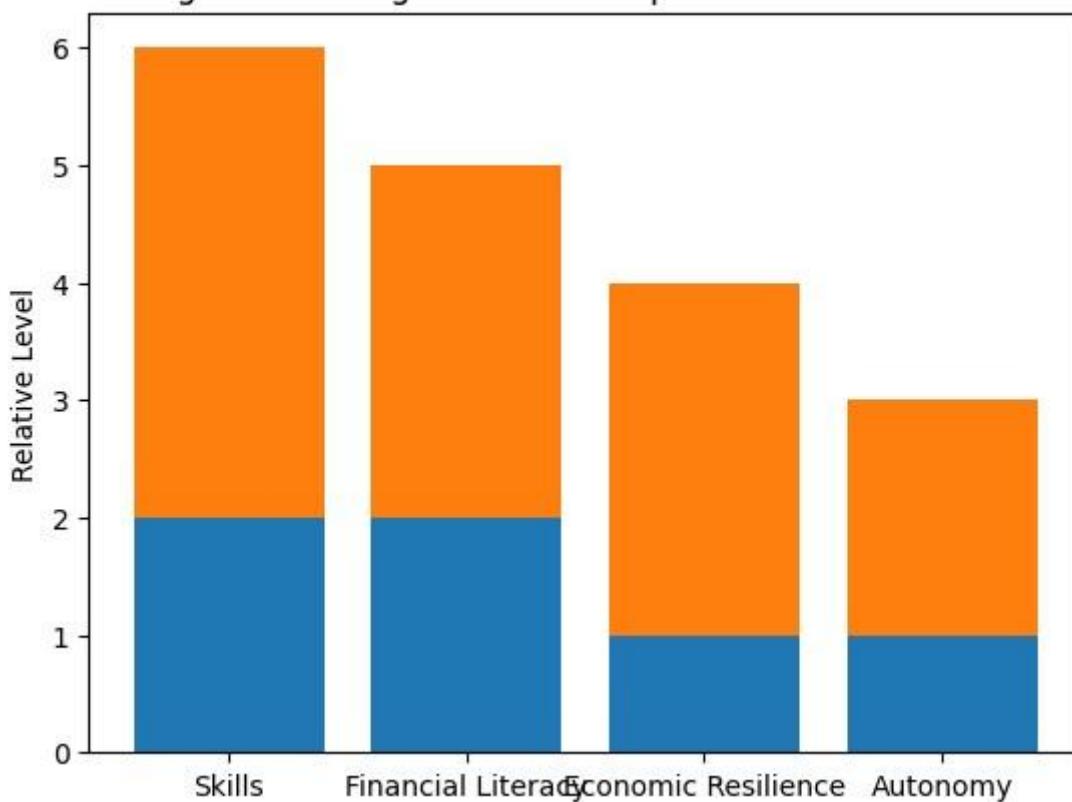


Figure 3 summarizes changes in key empowerment dimensions, showing improvements in skills and financial literacy but limited progress in long-term autonomy.

The limited participation of PRSE beneficiaries in strategic decision-making also aligns with empowerment theory, particularly Longwe's framework, which distinguishes between access and control as higher levels of empowerment (Longwe, 1991). While PRSE participants gained access to resources and training, they had minimal control over program design and evaluation. This finding echoes Nugroho's APKN framework, which emphasizes that empowerment cannot be achieved solely through material assistance without strengthening agency, participation, and decision-making power (Nugroho, 2017).

From a coordination perspective, the reliance on informal inter-agency interaction reflects both strengths and weaknesses of network governance. As noted by Rhodes (in Levi-Faur, 2011), informal networks can enhance flexibility and responsiveness but often suffer from weak accountability and sustainability. Similar findings have been reported by Suprapti et al. (2021), who found that fragmented coordination reduces the effectiveness of social empowerment programs. In the context of PRSE empowerment, the absence of institutionalized coordination mechanisms constrained the integration of social assistance and economic development policies, limiting long-term impact.

The observed empowerment outcomes correspond with previous empirical studies. Putri and Darwis (2015) found that women's microenterprise initiatives can enhance household resilience when supported by institutional facilitation, a pattern also evident in this study. However, consistent with Izzalqurny et al. (2022), the current findings indicate that empowerment gains are often short-lived due to limited follow-up support, weak market linkages, and insufficient mentoring. This suggests that empowerment programs tend to prioritize outputs (training and assistance) over outcomes (autonomy and sustainability). Theoretically, this study contributes to collaborative governance literature by demonstrating that collaboration alone does not guarantee empowerment outcomes unless accompanied by meaningful participation and power redistribution. It extends gender empowerment theory by situating women's vulnerability within governance processes, rather than treating empowerment solely as an individual or economic issue. Practically, the findings highlight the need for institutionalized coordination mechanisms, clearer role differentiation, and participatory program design to enhance the sustainability of PRSE empowerment initiatives.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. The qualitative design and single-case focus limit the generalizability of findings beyond the local context. Additionally, the analysis relies on self-reported data, which may be influenced by social desirability bias. Future research could employ comparative or mixed-method designs to examine collaborative governance models across regions and assess their long-term impacts on women's socioeconomic empowerment.

This section comprises analysis and further discussion of the particular study into a broader context of the topic.

Alignment of Findings with Research Questions

This study was guided by three core research questions:

- (1) How is collaborative governance structured and implemented in PRSE empowerment programs?
- (2) What are the roles and interactions of key stakeholders within the collaborative arrangement?
- (3) How does collaborative governance influence women's socioeconomic empowerment outcomes?

The results demonstrate that collaborative governance in PRSE empowerment is formally present but substantively limited. Regarding the first research question, collaboration is structured through inter-agency coordination led by the Social Affairs Office, involving Diskopum, OJK, and community facilitators. However, collaborative processes remain largely procedural and government-dominated. In response to the second research question, stakeholder roles are asymmetrical: public institutions control agenda-setting and resources, while PRSE beneficiaries participate primarily as program recipients rather than decision-makers. Addressing the third research question, the findings indicate that collaborative governance contributes to short-term empowerment outcomes—such as skills acquisition and increased confidence—but has limited impact on long-term economic autonomy due to weak institutional integration and sustainability mechanisms.

This explicit alignment confirms that the research questions are answered coherently through the empirical findings and theoretical interpretation, strengthening the internal consistency of the article.

This study examined collaborative governance in the empowerment of *Perempuan Rawan Sosial Ekonomi* (PRSE) within a decentralized local governance context. Drawing on qualitative empirical evidence, the findings reveal that collaborative governance has been partially institutionalized through multi-actor involvement but remains constrained by hierarchical dominance, limited beneficiary participation, and weak coordination mechanisms. While formal collaboration exists, substantive power-sharing and joint decision-making are insufficiently developed.

The results demonstrate that PRSE empowerment initiatives have successfully improved access to skills training, microeconomic activities, and basic financial literacy. These interventions contribute positively to short-term socioeconomic resilience and self-efficacy among beneficiaries. However, empowerment outcomes remain fragile and largely dependent on continued institutional support, indicating that empowerment has not yet reached higher levels of participation, control, and autonomy as conceptualized in empowerment theory.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to collaborative governance literature by demonstrating that collaboration alone does not automatically translate into effective empowerment outcomes. Meaningful empowerment requires not only institutional collaboration but also inclusive governance processes that redistribute decision-making power and strengthen women's agency. By integrating collaborative governance theory with gender empowerment frameworks, this article advances a governance-oriented understanding of women's vulnerability and empowerment.

Policy Implications

The findings generate several policy-relevant implications. First, collaborative governance arrangements in women's empowerment programs should move beyond symbolic participation toward substantive inclusion of beneficiaries in program design, implementation, and evaluation. Institutional mechanisms—such as participatory planning forums and beneficiary representation—are essential to enhance ownership and sustainability.

Second, inter-agency collaboration requires formalized coordination structures rather than reliance on ad hoc or informal interactions. Clear role differentiation, shared performance indicators, and integrated planning between social protection and economic development agencies can reduce policy fragmentation and improve long-term outcomes.

Third, empowerment policies should prioritize sustainability-oriented interventions, including continuous mentoring, market access facilitation, and adaptive financial support mechanisms. Without these components, empowerment programs risk reinforcing dependency rather than fostering economic autonomy.

Finally, local governments should embed gender-responsive governance principles within collaborative frameworks to ensure that empowerment initiatives address both structural inequalities and institutional constraints faced by socioeconomically vulnerable women. **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

This study is limited by its qualitative single-case design, which restricts the generalizability of findings to other contexts. Additionally, reliance on self-reported data may introduce subjective bias. Future research should adopt comparative or mixed-method approaches to examine collaborative governance models across regions and policy sectors. Longitudinal studies are also needed to assess the sustainability of empowerment outcomes over time and to evaluate the long-term institutional effects of collaborative governance on women's socioeconomic mobility.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that collaborative governance plays a strategic yet constrained role in the empowerment of *Perempuan Rawan Sosial Ekonomi* (PRSE) within a decentralized local governance context. The findings indicate that while multi-actor collaboration has been formally established through inter-agency involvement, governance practices remain predominantly government-led, with limited beneficiary participation in strategic decision-making. As a result, empowerment outcomes are largely confined to short-term gains in skills acquisition, financial awareness, and economic resilience, while long-term autonomy and sustainability remain insufficiently developed.

Theoretically, these findings refine collaborative governance theory by emphasizing that institutional collaboration alone is insufficient to generate transformative empowerment outcomes. Effective collaborative governance requires substantive power-sharing, inclusive participation, and institutionalized coordination mechanisms that enable marginalized groups to exercise agency and influence policy processes. By integrating collaborative governance with gender empowerment frameworks, this study advances a governance-based understanding of women's socioeconomic vulnerability and highlights the importance of aligning institutional arrangements with empowerment objectives.

From a practical perspective, the study underscores the need for policy designs that move beyond programmatic assistance toward governance reforms. Empowerment initiatives targeting socioeconomically vulnerable women should institutionalize participatory mechanisms, strengthen inter-agency coordination, and prioritize sustainability-oriented interventions such as long-term mentoring and market integration. These implications are particularly relevant for local governments and development agencies seeking to enhance the effectiveness of gender-responsive social policies.

This research contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence on how collaborative governance operates in practice within women's empowerment programs in a developing-country context. It fills an empirical gap by linking governance processes, institutional dynamics, and empowerment outcomes at the local level, thereby offering a more integrated analytical framework for studying gender-focused social policy implementation.

Future research should extend this inquiry through comparative and longitudinal designs to examine variations in collaborative governance models across regions and policy sectors. Further studies may also explore the role of non-state actors, market institutions, and digital platforms in strengthening sustainable empowerment pathways for vulnerable women. Such research would deepen understanding of how collaborative governance can be optimized to produce enduring socioeconomic transformation.

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