

# Policy Network Analysis in the Social Policy Formulation Process Cirebon City, West Java Province

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Submitted : 12-05-2025, Accepted : 17-06-2025, Published : 18-07-2025

## Abstract

Increasingly complex social issues require a social policy formulation process that involves various actors outside the government. Policy networks are a relevant approach to understanding the interactions and roles of actors in the social policy formulation process. This study aims to analyze policy networks in the social policy formulation process in Cirebon City, West Java Province. This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical research type. The results show that policy networks in the social policy formulation process in Cirebon City are not yet functioning optimally. The problems found include limited involvement of non-governmental actors, weak coordination across regional organizations, a lack of public dialogue forums, capacity imbalances between actors, limited social data, and low levels of trust between actors. This study concludes that strengthening the policy network requires improved cross-sector coordination, substantive involvement of non-governmental actors, institutionalization of dialogue forums, and building trust between actors to support a more participatory and collaborative social policy formulation process.

**Keywords:** policy network, policy formulation, social policy, Cirebon City.

## Introduction

Local governments are increasingly challenged by complex social issues, including poverty, social inequality, and the protection of vulnerable groups, which require responsive and inclusive social policies (Caravantes López de Lerma, 2020). These policy formulations must expand beyond the sole responsibility of government; they require collaboration between multiple stakeholders with diverse interests and resources (Sukandi, A. 2024). Effective strategies for poverty reduction, for example, must incorporate diverse approaches such as education and job creation, while also ensuring equitable access to essential social services such as healthcare and welfare (Genç et al., 2020). Addressing social inequalities is crucial for fostering inclusive societies, and local governments must prioritize the unique needs of vulnerable populations to create equitable environments.

A policy network approach is crucial for understanding social policy formulation, as it emphasizes the complex relationships and interactions between various actors, both governmental and non-governmental. This framework posits that public policy emerges not only from hierarchical structures but also through collaborative mechanisms such as coordination, negotiation, and cooperation among these actors (Saber & Gomaa, 2020). Collaborative

governance plays a crucial role in this process, as it facilitates the engagement of diverse stakeholders, enabling more inclusive policy development. Furthermore, governance networks describe the complex web of relationships that support policy formulation, highlighting the importance of collaboration in achieving effective governance outcomes (Abdullah & Afandi, 2021). Actor network theory further enhances this understanding by examining how human and non-human actors influence policy dynamics, revealing the multifaceted nature of these interactions.

The involvement of diverse actors, such as civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), is crucial in social policy formulation. These entities bring valuable knowledge and direct experience with social issues, enabling them to effectively inform policy networks (Marques, 2019). Policy networks, which encompass interactions between government agencies, civil society, and community groups, facilitate collaboration and collective problem-solving, leading to more targeted and responsive policies. Active participation of local communities in the planning and evaluation of these policies ensures that they are grounded in the realities and needs of the population (Pujianti et al., 2022). Ultimately, the integration of diverse perspectives through these networks enhances the social policy formulation process, making it more effective in addressing the specific challenges faced by the community.

Cirebon City, as a city in West Java Province, has diverse social characteristics and faces various social problems that require comprehensive policy approaches. The social policy formulation process in Cirebon City involves various actors and interests, forming a dynamic policy network. However, to date, academic studies specifically analyzing policy networks in the social policy formulation process in Cirebon City are relatively limited.

Based on this description, this study aims to analyze policy networks in the social policy formulation process in Cirebon City, West Java Province. This research is expected to provide theoretical contributions in the development of policy network studies as well as practical contributions for local governments in strengthening the process of formulating participatory and collaboration-based social policies.

## **Literature Review**

### **Public Policy and Social Policy**

Public policy is a series of decisions and actions taken by the government in response to public problems. Public policy encompasses all stages of the policy process, from formulation to implementation to evaluation. This stage involves identifying and defining public problems, setting objectives, and developing strategies to address them. This requires a comprehensive understanding of the problem, past policies, and the political landscape (Kasmawati et al., 2024).

Social policy is crucial for addressing complex social issues such as poverty, inequality,

and unemployment, requiring a comprehensive approach involving multiple stakeholders. Effective social welfare programs and poverty reduction strategies must consider the multidimensional nature of these problems, integrating economic empowerment, education, and healthcare to promote social inclusion and human development (Goss, 2022).

### **Social Policy Formulation Process**

The policy formulation process is a crucial stage in the public policy cycle, particularly in social policy, as it shapes the direction and substance of policies aimed at addressing societal needs. During this stage, various policy alternatives are generated and debated by stakeholders, including non-governmental actors, whose involvement is crucial to ensuring that policies are inclusive and responsive to existing social problems (Rodríguez-Edeza, 2021). The effectiveness of social policies is significantly influenced by factors such as social conditions, political interests, and the capacity of the actors involved (Howlett & Mukherjee, 2017). This comprehensive approach ensures that the resulting policies are not only well-informed but also aligned with the needs of the communities they are intended to serve.

### **Policy Network Concept**

A policy network is a concept that explains the relationships and interactions between actors in the public policy process. Rhodes views a policy network as a relatively stable pattern of relationships between interdependent actors in the policy process. In a policy network, power is not hierarchical, but rather distributed among actors according to their resources.

Marsh and Rhodes developed a typology of policy networks that demonstrates that networks can have varying degrees of openness and integration. This typology helps understand the variations in relationships between actors in the policy process, including at the stage of social policy formulation.

### **Policy Networks in the Social Policy Formulation Process**

Policy networks play a crucial role in the social policy formulation process because they enable interaction and information exchange between actors. Government actors, civil society organizations, academics, and local communities interact within networks to convey interests and ideas related to social policy. However, political opportunity structures and transaction costs also play a significant role in shaping these exchanges. Political actors tend to form connections that minimize transaction costs while maximizing the reach and flow of information, leading to complementary, but not always congruent, types of information exchange (Leifeld & Schneider, 2012).

## **Methods**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical approach. The qualitative approach was chosen to deeply understand the dynamics of policy networks in the social policy formulation process. This research was conducted in Cirebon City, West Java Province. The research focused on the social policy formulation process, particularly the involvement and interactions between actors within the policy network. This study not only examines the role of local governments but also non-governmental actors involved in social policy formulation. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, selecting informants with knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the social policy formulation process.

## **Results and Discussion**

Based on the results of field research, problems were found related to Policy Networks in the Social Policy Formulation Process in Cirebon City, including .

1. The social policy formulation process in Cirebon City is still dominated by local government actors. The involvement of non-governmental actors, such as civil society organizations, local communities, and academics, tends to be consultative and has not been substantially integrated into decision-making. This situation has resulted in the formation of an inclusive policy network.
2. Social issues are cross-sectoral and require coordination between Regional Apparatus Organizations (OPDs). However, in practice, coordination between OPDs in Cirebon City in the social policy formulation process is still suboptimal. Each OPD tends to work based on its respective sectoral authority, resulting in a lack of integration in the social policy formulation process.
3. Dialogue forums involving the community and stakeholders in social policy formulation are still limited. Public participation mechanisms are often formal and do not yet provide effective dialogue spaces. As a result, the aspirations and needs of the community, particularly vulnerable groups, are not fully accommodated in social policy.
4. There is a capacity imbalance among actors involved in the social policy formulation process. Government actors have greater access to information and resources than civil society or local community actors. This inequality impacts the bargaining position of non-governmental actors in policy networks and limits their role in the policy formulation process.
5. Actors involved in social policy have different interests and perspectives. These differing interests have not been fully managed through effective dialogue and negotiation

mechanisms. This has the potential to create conflicts of interest and impact the quality of formulated social policies.

6. The social policy formulation process in Cirebon City still faces limitations in integrated social data and information. Data on poverty, vulnerable groups, and other social issues is often scattered across various agencies and is not well coordinated. This situation makes it difficult for actors in the policy network to formulate evidence-based social policies.
7. Trust between actors is a crucial prerequisite for establishing an effective policy network. In Cirebon City, the level of trust between actors in the social policy formulation process remains relatively weak, particularly between the government and the community. This low level of trust has resulted in limited collaborative commitment within the policy network.

## DISCUSSION

1. The analysis shows that the social policy formulation process in Cirebon City is still dominated by local government actors. The involvement of non-government actors tends to be symbolic and has not significantly influenced decision-making. This condition indicates that the policy network has not been formed in an inclusive manner. From a policy network perspective, the involvement of non-government actors is a crucial element in enriching policy alternatives and increasing the legitimacy of social policies. The Cirebon City Government needs to expand and deepen the involvement of non-government actors in the social policy formulation process through meaningful participation mechanisms. This involvement must be substantive from the early stages of policy formulation, not simply formal consultation.
2. Coordination issues between regional government agencies (OPDs) are a major challenge in the social policy formulation process. Cross-sectoral social issues require integrated collaboration between OPDs. However, sectoral egos and limited coordination mechanisms result in a fragmented policy formulation process. This indicates that the policy network structure within the regional government remains weak. A more structured cross-OPD coordination mechanism is needed, such as the establishment of a cross-sectoral social policy formulation team or forum. This mechanism can reduce sectoral egos and encourage social policy integration.
3. Limited dialogue forums hinder the absorption of public aspirations in the social policy formulation process. Formal public participation results in formulated policies that are

less responsive to the needs of vulnerable groups. In the context of policy networks, the limited space for dialogue reduces the quality of interaction and trust between actors. Public dialogue forums need to be institutionalized as ongoing communication spaces between the government and the public. These forums can serve as a medium for conveying aspirations and a space for negotiation in the social policy formulation process.

4. Capacity imbalances between actors lead to imbalanced bargaining power within policy networks. Government actors have greater resources and access to information than community actors. This situation limits the contribution of non-governmental actors to social policy formulation, resulting in unequal functioning of policy networks. Local governments need to encourage capacity-building programs for non-governmental actors through training, mentoring, and providing access to policy information. With adequate capacity, non-governmental actors can participate more actively and equally in policy networks.
5. Differing interests between actors are an unavoidable phenomenon in the social policy process. However, in Cirebon City, these differing interests have not been effectively managed through dialogue and negotiation mechanisms. As a result, these differing interests have the potential to influence the direction and quality of formulated social policies. Differing interests between actors need to be managed through dialogue, mediation, and consensus mechanisms. The local government plays a role as a mediator to ensure that these differing interests are directed toward shared goals in social policy.
6. The limited availability of integrated social data is a barrier to the process of formulating evidence-based social policies. Disparate and unsynchronized data across agencies makes it difficult for actors in policy networks to formulate targeted social policies. This indicates weak technical aspects within policy networks. Developing an integrated social data system that is accessible to policy network actors is a crucial step. Accurate and coordinated data can support the process of formulating evidence-based and targeted social policies.

Low levels of trust between actors constitute a serious obstacle to the formation of effective policy networks. Lack of transparency and suboptimal collaboration experiences reinforce mutual suspicion among actors. From a policy network perspective, trust is the ~~primary social capital that determines the sustainability of collaboration. Trust can be built~~

through transparency in the policy process, consistent collaborative commitments, and joint evaluation of the results of social policy formulation. Successful small-scale collaboration can provide the initial capital to strengthen policy networks sustainably.

## Conclusion

This research demonstrates that policy networks play a strategic role in the social policy formulation process in Cirebon City. The social policy formulation process involves various actors, both from local government and non-governmental actors. However, the established policy networks have not yet fully functioned optimally in supporting an inclusive and collaborative social policy formulation process. Based on these findings, this research emphasizes that strengthening policy networks in social policy formulation requires comprehensive efforts. The Cirebon City Government needs to strengthen cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms, expand the substantive involvement of non-governmental actors, and establish sustainable dialogue forums. Furthermore, increasing actor capacity, collaboratively managing differing interests, strengthening social data systems, and building trust between actors are crucial steps to improve the quality of the social policy formulation process.

The research findings reveal several key issues, including limited involvement of non-governmental actors, weak coordination across regional government agencies, a lack of effective dialogue forums and public participation, capacity imbalances between actors, poorly managed differing interests, limited integrated social data, and low levels of trust between actors. These issues indicate that policy networks in the social policy formulation process in Cirebon City still face structural, institutional, and relational challenges. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of policy network studies in the context of social policy formulation at the city government level. Practically, the results of this study are expected to serve as a consideration for the Cirebon City Government in formulating more participatory, responsive, and welfare-oriented social policies.

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