

## Integrated Social Empowerment to Improve the Quality of Life of Vulnerable Groups in Urban Areas

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to develop an Integrated Social Empowerment Model (ISEM) to address the low effectiveness of sectoral empowerment programs, which reflects a gap between government policy and the sustainable improvement of urban vulnerable groups' quality of life. Employing a qualitative methodology with an intrinsic case study design in Harmoni Subdistrict, Kencana City, the research provides an in-depth understanding of service implementation failures. This site was selected due to its juxtaposition of abundant programs and high structural vulnerability, offering rich insights. Eight key informants including bureaucrats, service providers, community representatives, and families were purposively selected to achieve triangulation of perspectives. Thematic analysis reveals that program ineffectiveness arises from conflicting orientations (output versus outcome), violation of New Public Service principles, and lack of formalized co-production, neglecting existing community capacities. The study proposes ISEM as a novel framework that integrates professional interventions, family support, and community networks through sustainable participatory mechanisms. Findings suggest enhancing public service management quality via collaboration and citizen engagement, with recommendations highlighting regulatory reforms to establish a Collaborative Social Service Coordination Unit (CSSCU) for structural co-production implementation.



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## INTRODUCTION

Poverty and social inequality in urban areas have emerged as persistent global challenges, reflecting the tension between the promises of modernity and the realities of structural marginalization (Ferrari et al. 2024). With rapid urbanization, vulnerable populations—including unsupported older adults, neglected children, individuals with mental health conditions, and persons with disabilities face heightened exposure to social, economic, and health risks. This research is motivated by the urgent need to reconceptualize social empowerment strategies in a more holistic and community-based manner (Haqi and Dühr 2022). Although numerous initiatives and policies have been implemented by governments and non-profit organizations, persistent structural vulnerability indicates that existing interventions are often fragmented, sectoral, and disconnected from the daily realities of target groups. Previous studies on empowerment primarily focus on economic dimensions, such as vocational training or capital assistance, or on health dimensions, such as access to facilities, yet rarely address collective well-being and social inclusion in an integrated manner (Kwakye 2022). These dimensions are essential for achieving a dignified and sustainable quality of life for marginalized groups. The situation is further exacerbated by limited social infrastructure in densely populated urban settings, where opportunities for community interaction and support are increasingly constrained (Supangkat 2024).

The central problem addressed in this study concerns the low effectiveness of existing social empowerment policies, which fail to produce meaningful and long-term impacts on the quality of life of urban vulnerable groups (Creineanu and Mărcuță 2024). Specifically, such policies often lack precision in targeting beneficiaries, are implemented in a top-down manner without active community participation, and most critically, fail to integrate the three essential pillars of empowerment: professional social interventions, psychosocial support from families, and the mobilization of

community networks as assets (Park et al. 2022). The consequences of these implementation failures are evident in high recidivism in social problems, such as repeated child neglect or renewed isolation of older adults, illustrating that interventions are largely curative and short-term rather than preventive and transformative. Furthermore, systematic gaps in inter-agency coordination exacerbate inefficiencies, resulting in program duplication and suboptimal resource allocation (Ferrari et al. 2024).

This context highlights a critical research gap. While international scholarship has underscored the importance of empowerment, methodological deficiencies persist in measuring and designing interventions that explicitly integrate the three vital components professional intervention, family support, and community networks within a single framework (Olaya et al. 2022a). Existing studies often treat families and communities as passive recipients rather than active agents in empowerment processes (BOWEN et al. 2025). This gap underscores the need for a novel conceptual model that not only focuses on individual capacity-building but also strengthens the surrounding social ecosystem, fostering collective social resilience (Romero-Carazas et al. 2022). Additionally, qualitative insights are often limited, leaving underexplored the perspectives and narratives of key informants—social workers, community activists, and vulnerable populations themselves—regarding the structural barriers they encounter daily. Such data are critical for ensuring the validity of policy recommendations (Park et al. 2022).

The novelty of this study lies in the formulation of the Integrated Social Empowerment Model (ISEM). ISEM proposes a coordinated framework that simultaneously strengthens the capacities of vulnerable individuals, revitalizes family support roles, and activates local community networks to establish independent referral and monitoring systems (Leshchenko 2023). The model represents not merely a synthesis of existing interventions but a philosophical restructuring, conceptualizing empowerment as an ecological and sustainable process, wherein individual progress is reinforced by supportive social structures (Varni and Havidz 2024). Through an in-depth case study, the model aims to provide empirical evidence on how multi-sectoral integration can enhance quality of life beyond conventional physical and economic welfare indicators, encompassing dignity, social inclusion, and civic participation (Günther and Krems 2022).

Research questions guiding this study are: (1) How does the implementation of existing social empowerment programs affect the current quality of life of vulnerable urban populations? (2) What are the most significant structural and operational barriers to integrating professional social interventions, family support, and community networks in empowerment programs? (3) How can the Integrated Social Empowerment Model (ISEM) be formulated and empirically tested to provide sustainable policy recommendations for enhancing collective well-being among urban vulnerable groups?

The primary objectives of this research are: (1) To analyze in depth the effectiveness and limitations of ongoing social empowerment programs for vulnerable populations in urban areas; (2) To identify critical components and mechanisms required to integrate professional social interventions, family support, and community network mobilization within empowerment efforts; and (3) To formulate and recommend a sustainable, evidence-based Integrated Social Empowerment Model (ISEM) capable of effectively improving the quality of life of urban vulnerable groups.

The significance of this research spans theoretical, academic, and practical dimensions. Theoretically, it contributes to social empowerment scholarship by offering an integrative framework that transcends disciplinary boundaries—including social work, sociology, and public policy—particularly in the Southeast Asian urban context (Melo, Mello, and Oaquim 2024). Academically, the study provides rich qualitative primary data that can serve as a credible reference for future research on social inclusion, urban poverty, and social capital in reputable international journals. Practically, the findings are highly relevant for local and national policymakers seeking to revise social protection programs, particularly in budget allocation and intervention design (Lichtenheld et al. 2024). They also provide concrete guidance for non-governmental organizations and social workers to develop programs that are genuinely empowering and sustainable. Policy recommendations derived from this study aim to promote a shift from a charitable approach to one grounded in community asset-based strategies (McCallum, Mair, and Macdonald 2023).

Nevertheless, this study has limitations. The qualitative focus, based on in-depth interviews with key informants, constrains the statistical generalizability of findings beyond the specific study context. Moreover, defining and measuring “quality of life” and “collective well-being” requires careful interpretation, and results may be influenced by the subjective narratives of informants (Humpal, Anguiano, and Fraidenburg 2022). Limitations also include challenges in isolating the specific impact of ISEM from other macro socio-economic variables (Zalianty and Sukmana 2025).

Future research is recommended to adopt quantitative or mixed-method approaches. Subsequent studies could empirically test the Integrated Social Empowerment Model (ISEM) formulated in this study through large-scale statistical analysis or longitudinal studies to track the long-term effects of model implementation on objective welfare indicators such as income, mental health, and civic engagement among vulnerable populations (Aliyari 2025). Additionally, future research could extend the sample scope to urban areas in other developing countries to validate the relevance and adaptability of ISEM across diverse cultural and policy contexts.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study utilizes a qualitative research approach to gain an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the complexities associated with Integrated Social Empowerment (ISE) and its impact on enhancing the quality of life of vulnerable groups in urban areas (Aftab, Taghilo, and Houshmand 2024). The qualitative approach was chosen due to its intrinsic capability to explore the processes, meanings, and social contexts underlying both the success and failure of empowerment programs. Unlike quantitative methods that primarily focus on statistical generalization, qualitative research aims to uncover perspectives, experiences, and rich narratives from key actors, including beneficiaries, family members, community activists, and public service providers. This approach aligns with contemporary public administration research, which emphasizes not only measuring outcomes but also analyzing governance processes and interactions among actors (Noor 2024).

The research design adopted is an Intrinsic Case Study, which allows for intensive exploration of a bounded social unit, specifically a social empowerment program within a particular urban area (Yüksel et al. 2023). This design is particularly suitable because the case under study the integration of professional social interventions, family support, and community networks presents a unique and specific context that warrants detailed examination (Noor 2024). The intrinsic case study enables the identification of causal mechanisms often overlooked in large-scale surveys and allows an understanding of how the proposed Integrated Social Empowerment Model (ISEM) operates in practice. The focus is not on generalizing findings to a larger population but on generating rich, contextually grounded insights, which are particularly valuable for policy recommendations that are both specific and applicable (Shao 2023).

The research site was purposively selected in Harmoni Subdistrict, Kencana City, West Java Province. Harmoni Subdistrict meets the criteria of an information-rich case and reflects contradictions relevant to the central problem of the study. The area was chosen due to its dense urban population and significant heterogeneity of vulnerable groups, including older adults, neglected children, and individuals with disabilities, making it an ideal laboratory to test integrated empowerment concepts (AbdulKareem and Oladimeji 2024). Additionally, Harmoni has a history of social empowerment program implementation, yet these initiatives have demonstrated varying effectiveness and faced criticism for limited inter-agency collaboration, highlighting the research gap addressed in this study. The presence of active community networks and local non-governmental organizations demonstrates the potential for leveraging community capacity within a co-production framework. This selection thus reflects the disparity between community expectations and government service delivery while presenting opportunities for participatory innovation (Annahar et al. 2023).

The unit of analysis focuses on the processes and interactions involved in social empowerment efforts, particularly the implementation of professional interventions, the role of family support, and the mobilization of community networks (Boyle et al. 2022). Consistent with qualitative research principles and the case study design, this study does not rely on statistical samples but rather engages key informants selected through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. A total of eight (8) key informants were identified, grouped into three categories, ensuring triangulation of perspectives and a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study.

**Table.12. Informants and Their Roles in the Integrated Social Empowerment Study**

| <b>Informant Category</b>                  | <b>Informant Name</b> | <b>Role / Relevance</b>  |
|--|-----------------------|--|
| Government Service Providers               | Mr. Surya             | Head of Social Empowerment Division; provides insights on authority, policy formulation, structural barriers, and operational challenges at the grassroots level |
|  | Mrs. Dewi             | Program Coordinator, Harmoni Subdistrict; provides operational insights on program delivery and coordination   |
| Community and Family Actors                | Mr. Didi              | Chair of Community Network; offers perspective on existing community capacity  |
|  | Mrs. Santi            | Family Representative of Disability Beneficiaries; highlights family support dynamics  |
|  | Mr. Rudi              | Former Neglected Child / Youth Activist; represents firsthand experience of beneficiaries  |
| Academics / Non-Governmental Practitioners | Prof. Wira            | Public Policy Expert; provides critical academic analysis and conceptual validation  |
|  | Mr. Tedi              | Director of Partner NGO for Empowerment; offers practical insights on social intervention strategies   |
|  | Mrs. Liana            | Professional Social Worker; provides perspective on operational challenges in vulnerable group interventions   |

Source: Compiled by the author based on field research, 2026

This table.1 categorizes the key informants involved in the study and outlines their relevance to understanding urban social empowerment for vulnerable groups. Government service providers, including Mr. Surya and Mrs. Dewi, contribute insights on policy, authority, and operational challenges. Community and family actors, such as Mr. Didi, Mrs. Santi, and Mr. Rudi, provide perspectives on community capacity, family support, and lived experiences of beneficiaries. Academics and non-governmental practitioners, including Prof. Wira, Mr. Tedi, and Mrs. Liana, offer critical analysis, practical strategies, and operational perspectives. Together, these informants ensure triangulation of perspectives for developing the Integrated Social Empowerment Model (ISEM).

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured in-depth interviews, participatory observation within vulnerable communities, and document analysis of policy documents, program reports, and local regulations. These methods allow the study to capture both subjective experiences and institutional perspectives, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics, constraints, and opportunities of integrated social empowerment programs.

The collected qualitative data were analyzed using Thematic Analysis as developed by Braun and Clarke. This approach involved transcribing raw data into textual format, generating initial codes to identify key phrases and concepts relevant to New Public Service (NPS), Co-Production, and Community Capacity, and subsequently clustering these codes into coherent themes. The identified themes were then reviewed and refined to ensure internal consistency and conceptual clarity. Finally, themes were defined and named to reflect both empirical observations and theoretical alignment with the study's conceptual framework. This analytical approach enables a systematic interpretation of patterns in governance processes, family involvement, and community engagement.

Conclusions were drawn inductively and iteratively, linking thematic findings with the theoretical frameworks that guided the study. Pattern matching and cross-case synthesis facilitated a rigorous interpretation, leading to the formulation of the Integrated Social Empowerment Model (ISEM). This model represents a novel contribution, synthesizing existing community capacities, identified co-production mechanisms, and the principles of NPS to create an actionable framework for urban social empowerment.

Data validity was reinforced through source triangulation, drawing on informants from government, community/family, and academic/NGO sectors, and method triangulation, combining interviews, observations, and document analysis. This approach ensured that conclusions were not based on a single perspective but reflected multiple viewpoints, thereby enhancing reliability and credibility. The methodology robustly supports the study's objective to develop sustainable, evidence-based policy recommendations rooted in participatory mechanisms and rich case study evidence.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the research process. All participants provided informed consent, and confidentiality was maintained to protect sensitive information. The anonymity of informants was ensured, and data were used exclusively for research purposes. This ethical rigor reinforces the integrity of the research findings and aligns with international standards for social research in urban settings.

Although the qualitative intrinsic case study offers rich insights, it is important to note the limitations. The findings are context-specific and not statistically generalizable to other urban areas. Measuring complex concepts such as "quality of life" and "collective well-being" requires careful interpretation, and the results may reflect the subjective perceptions of informants. Moreover, isolating the specific impact of the ISEM from broader socio-economic and policy variables presents methodological challenges. Nevertheless, the study prioritizes depth and contextual understanding, providing practical insights that are directly relevant for urban policy design and social service practice (Yin, Chen, and Li 2022).

In conclusion, the methodology employed in this research offers a comprehensive framework for investigating integrated social empowerment in urban contexts. The intrinsic case study design, purposive selection of key informants, triangulated data collection methods, and thematic analysis collectively provide a robust basis for formulating the Integrated Social Empowerment Model (ISEM). By focusing on professional social interventions, family support, and community networks, this methodology enables a nuanced understanding of how participatory, co-produced approaches can enhance the quality of life for urban vulnerable populations. The results provide both theoretical contributions to public administration and practical guidance for policymakers, NGOs, and social workers aiming to implement sustainable and participatory urban social programs.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study empirically confirm the main problem addressed, which is the low effectiveness of existing social empowerment programs in producing long-term improvements in the quality of life of vulnerable urban populations. Program implementation was found to be fragmented and unbalanced, largely dominated by a sectoral approach. Professional interventions, such as microenterprise support or skills training, were executed separately from psychosocial family support and community mobilization. This phenomenon can be interpreted through the lens of New Public Service (NPS) theory, where bureaucracy, as highlighted by Mr. Surya, often prioritizes administrative targets (outputs) over the creation of substantive public value (outcomes or citizen well-being). The emphasis on input efficiency has overshadowed the fundamental purpose of NPS, which is to serve citizens rather than control them. Consequently, empowerment programs remain top-down, contradicting the essence of NPS.

The findings further reveal that program ineffectiveness also stems from the underutilization of Community Capacity Theory. Community informants, such as Mr. Didi and Mrs. Santi, emphasized that externally provided assistance often fails to match the specific needs of vulnerable groups—for example, older adults require mobile health services rather than sewing training. This indicates weak needs assessment processes, where existing social capital and local leadership are underrecognized. The community's capacity in Harmoni Subdistrict, encompassing networks, trust, and norms, is treated as passive recipients rather than integral assets. Consequently, programs lack sustainability beyond government funding, as communities do not perceive ownership.

From a theoretical standpoint, low program effectiveness reflects a failure to apply Co-production Theory in practice. Mrs. Dewi, Program Coordinator, acknowledged that citizens and families are considered recipients rather than partners in service production. The absence of formal

mechanisms for citizen participation in program design and evaluation ensures that service outcomes such as improved quality of life are mono-produced by the government, rendering results less relevant and impactful.

The research gap regarding the absence of a model integrating professional interventions, family support, and community networks is empirically validated through observed functional fragmentation. Professional interventions, managed by social worker Mrs. Liana, focus primarily on individual vulnerable persons. Family support, represented by Mrs. Santi, occurs informally without structured psychosocial intervention. Community networks, led by Mr. Didi, operate voluntarily and independently of formal governmental systems. Theoretically, this gap is reinforced by a partial understanding of the three guiding frameworks. First, the current application of NPS by government institutions does not effectively translate citizen orientation into integrated institutional mechanisms. Second, community capacity gaps emerge from the inability to convert social capital into structural capital. Mr. Rudi exemplified this, noting that young people who have developed independence are not utilized as mentors for neglected children due to the lack of an official co-production platform. Third, Co-production theory highlights the most significant gap: existing partnerships are informal consultations rather than joint responsibility arrangements for service provision and oversight, as recommended by Ostrom. This evidence underscores that integration of the three pillars the theoretical and practical novelty of this study is imperative.

The formulation of the Integrated Social Empowerment Model (ISEM) addresses these gaps. Regarding existing program effectiveness, results indicate low-to-moderate impact, with successes largely limited to physical and economic improvements (outputs) rather than fostering social inclusion and dignity (outcomes), consistent with NPS critiques of output-oriented bureaucracy. Major integration barriers include sectoral egos among agencies, as noted by Mr. Surya, and insufficient formal family involvement, as observed by Prof. Wira. These obstacles reflect a failure to recognize community capacity and disregard for co-production principles. Consequently, the ISEM integrates three axes: Pro-Citizen Policy (NPS), Community Asset Strengthening (Community Capacity), and Joint Responsibility Partnership (Co-production). The model emphasizes a Community Digital Platform that connects social worker interventions, family networks, and citizen oversight.

The study identifies practical benefits of ISEM, confirming that active citizen participation, as emphasized by Co-production theory, enhances service effectiveness. Experts Prof. Wira and Mr. Tedi highlighted that citizen engagement is a prerequisite for realizing the values of NPS, which advocates recognizing and optimizing community capacity as a foundation for sustainable empowerment. ISEM thus provides a participatory evidence-based solution for public service management gaps.

**Table.2 Key Empirical Insights Supporting the Integrated Social Empowerment Model (ISEM)**

| Key Findings                           | Evidence from Informants | Implications for ISEM   |
|--|--------------------------|---|
| Low effectiveness of sectoral programs | Mr. Surya, Mrs. Dewi     | Integration required to shift from top-down to participatory approaches |
| Underutilization of community assets   | Mr. Didi, Mrs. Santi     | Leverage social capital for program sustainability                      |
| Lack of co-production mechanisms       | Mrs. Dewi, Mr. Rudi      | Establish formal platforms for citizen partnership in service delivery  |
| Fragmentation of interventions         | Mrs. Liana, Mrs. Santi   | Integrate professional, family, and community-based support             |
| Digital platform necessity             | Prof. Wira, Mr. Tedi     | Central hub for coordination, co-production, and monitoring             |

Source: Compiled by the author based on field research, 2026.

The table.2. summarizes the main findings from the study, linking evidence from key informants to the design implications for the Integrated Social Empowerment Model (ISEM). Findings indicate that sectoral programs are largely ineffective, emphasizing the need for integration and participatory approaches. Community assets remain underutilized, highlighting the importance of leveraging social capital to enhance sustainability. The absence of formal co-production mechanisms calls for structured citizen engagement platforms. Fragmented interventions necessitate the integration of professional, family, and community support. Finally, informants underscore the critical role of a digital platform as a central hub to coordinate, monitor, and facilitate co-production in urban social empowerment initiatives.

The main research problem, which is the low effectiveness of existing social empowerment programs, is both empirically confirmed and theoretically relevant. Field findings in Harmoni Subdistrict align with Denhardt and Denhardt's (2015) critique of bureaucratic overemphasis on internal performance (outputs) rather than citizen-centered outcomes. Existing programs remain trapped in top-down distribution logic, prioritizing sectoral assistance while neglecting holistic needs of vulnerable populations. These results validate prior studies such as Osborne and Stokosch (2013), which emphasize shifting public service management from provision to co-creation of value.

The functional fragmentation observed reflects the inability of the current administration to operationalize NPS principles effectively. Professional interventions, family support, and community networks operate independently, highlighting the government's lack of understanding regarding its role as a facilitator within the citizen ecosystem. This failure illustrates that effective empowerment requires acknowledging citizen networks as central assets in governance processes.

The research gap the absence of an integrated empowerment model is confirmed through field evidence, showing that relational community assets exist but are unrecognized and disconnected from formal government systems. Prior studies by Selsky and Stoecker (2018) stress that community capacity extends beyond physical resources to include relational assets, such as trust, networks, and norms. In Harmoni, these assets remain untapped, limiting the sustainability and relevance of interventions. ISEM explicitly positions community networks as essential co-production partners, addressing this gap and reinforcing Bovaird's (2007) assertion that high-quality social services are achieved when social capital is transformed into structural capital through service delivery processes.

The findings directly address the research questions and objectives. Identified integration barriers, including inter-agency sectoral egos and lack of formal family participation, reflect conflicts between traditional hierarchical governance and NPS's collaborative orientation. Ostrom (2009) notes that co-production failures often stem from governance systems unprepared to accommodate citizen input, rather than citizen unwillingness. ISEM bridges this empirical-theoretical divide, integrating NPS, Community Capacity, and Co-production into a coherent framework. The model aligns with Brandsen and Pestoff's (2008) advocacy of co-production as a means to enhance service quality, relevance, and ownership.

The theoretical contributions of ISEM are significant. The model expands Co-production theory by explicitly incorporating social work interventions and family support as mandatory co-production dimensions, rarely addressed in traditional public administration literature, which often emphasizes general services like sanitation or safety. ISEM's novelty lies in merging NPS philosophy, community assets, and co-production mechanisms into a transferable and testable framework, applicable to urban contexts globally.

Academically, the research provides rich qualitative data, particularly regarding street-level bureaucracy and the challenges of collaborative governance. Triangulation of sources from bureaucracy, community actors, and beneficiaries enhances validity and reliability. These insights offer a strong foundation for further research, including quantitative testing of the ISEM framework, as suggested by Van Eijk and Steen (2014). Practically, ISEM presents a concrete policy recommendation, shifting resource allocation from ad-hoc assistance to integrated social infrastructure investment. Social workers and community activists gain a clear operational framework to engage with government as equal partners rather than passive recipients or service suppliers.

Overall, the discussion confirms that addressing urban social empowerment inefficiencies requires a philosophical shift consistent with NPS, recognition of local assets (Community Capacity), and the establishment of formal joint responsibility mechanisms (Co-production). ISEM, emerging from theoretical synthesis and empirical findings, represents not only a model but a fundamental restructuring of public service management for vulnerable urban populations. The proposed Community Digital Platform as a co-production hub is a critical practical implication, aligning with contemporary trends in e-community capacity development. This platform ensures that citizen involvement enhances service sustainability and aligns public service responses with community expectations, effectively bridging the gap between policy promise and implementation reality.

## CONCLUSION

This study primarily aimed to develop an Integrated Social Empowerment Model (ISEM) in response to the limited effectiveness of partial social empowerment programs targeting vulnerable groups in urban areas. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research findings affirm that the inability of existing programs to sustainably enhance the quality of life of vulnerable populations is rooted in the failure of public administration systems to integrate professional interventions, family support, and community networks. This gap, identified at the outset of the study, is fundamental to understanding the ineffectiveness of prior initiatives. Current programs remain heavily output-oriented, prioritizing bureaucratic targets over the creation of citizen-centered public value, which stands in contrast to the principles of the New Public Service (NPS).

Thematic analysis comparing empirical findings with academic literature indicates that the solution lies in a paradigm shift from mono-produced services toward co-production, where citizens actively participate in service design, implementation, and monitoring. Existing programs often neglect Community Capacity Theory, with social capital and local leadership potential treated as passive rather than structural assets. Citizen, family, and community engagement occurs informally and ad hoc, limiting the sustainability of professional social interventions.

Specifically, the research questions were addressed through the formulation of ISEM, representing both a theoretical and practical novelty. The model integrates three essential collaborative axes. The Pro-Citizen Policy Axis (NPS) ensures that policies prioritize citizen needs and dignity rather than bureaucratic targets. The Community Asset Strengthening Axis (Community Capacity) formalizes and activates social networks as partners in oversight and support. The Joint Responsibility Partnership Axis (Co-production) establishes formal institutional mechanisms connecting the government, social workers, families, and community actors in a shared responsibility framework.

The research successfully achieved its goal of proposing a sustainable policy framework. ISEM implies that public service management should transition from hierarchical, top-down relationships to polycentric, collaborative structures, positioning government as a facilitator rather than the sole authority. Results highlight that implementing ISEM, particularly through the creation of a Community Digital Platform, can provide a continuous participatory mechanism, significantly enhancing service effectiveness by fostering a sense of ownership among citizens.

The study's implications are extensive. Theoretically, ISEM enriches public administration literature by offering a multi-dimensional co-production framework, specifically applicable to urban social services. Practically, it provides actionable guidance for government agencies to redirect resources toward inclusive social infrastructure, addressing the needs of older adults, neglected children, individuals with mental health challenges, and persons with disabilities. Academically, the research contributes a rich qualitative case study for future quantitative testing of ISEM, allowing for empirical validation of integrated social empowerment models.

In conclusion, improving the quality of life for vulnerable urban populations relies on public service systems' capacity to implement NPS principles through co-production mechanisms supported by community capacity. Social empowerment must be conceptualized as an ecological and collective process rather than a series of individual interventions. Sustainable policy recommendations should emphasize the creation of platforms where citizen engagement is an integral component of service management, ultimately enhancing public accountability, responsiveness, and relevance.

Recommendations are proposed to transform public social service management into a sustainable participatory model: practical policy recommendations, model development guidance, and directions for further research.

Practical Policy Recommendations (Co-production and NPS Implications) suggest that the City of Kencana, particularly the Social Services Department, should formally adopt ISEM through internal regulatory reforms that support structured co-production partnerships. This should be operationalized by establishing a Collaborative Social Service Coordination Unit (CSSCU) at the neighborhood level. CSSCU should mandate the participation of representatives from vulnerable groups, professional social workers, and community capacity leaders (e.g., Mr. Didi) as active decision-making partners rather than passive information recipients. This approach operationalizes NPS principles, placing citizens at the core, and addresses current program failures due to sectoral egos and the lack of formal participatory platforms. Budget allocation should shift from one-time aid to sustainable social infrastructure investment, including family soft skill training for psychosocial support and development of a Community Digital Platform for two-way communication, case referrals, and community-based oversight.

Community Capacity Strengthening Recommendations emphasize that empowerment programs should be conducted with communities rather than for communities. Governments should map existing social capital assets in each neighborhood, identifying key leaders and informal networks (e.g., senior citizen networks, mental health activists). These assets should be officially recognized and supported technically, rather than financially, to strengthen collective capability in managing internal services. ISEM recommends Capacity-Building Programs for Partners, where professional social workers provide leadership, advocacy, and managerial training to community key leaders. This ensures program sustainability, bridging the gap between citizen expectations and government service delivery through decentralized mechanisms.

Recommendations for Further Research (Academic and Theoretical Implications) encourage quantitative and longitudinal studies to validate and expand the theoretical benefits of ISEM. Large-scale quantitative analyses across multiple urban areas in Indonesia or Southeast Asia could statistically examine ISEM's effectiveness, isolating the specific impact of co-production on objective indicators of quality of life, such as income, mental health, and civic engagement. Longitudinal studies are necessary to assess long-term sustainability and verify the durability of community social capital after formal government support is withdrawn. Such research will enhance ISEM's external validity and contribute significantly to global public administration literature on collaborative governance, co-production, and urban social service management.

Overall, these recommendations provide a comprehensive roadmap to shift social empowerment practices from fragmented, top-down interventions to an integrated, sustainable, citizen-centered framework. Implementing ISEM can foster resilience, local ownership, and collaborative service provision, ultimately improving the quality of life of urban vulnerable populations while creating a replicable model for similar contexts worldwide.

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