

EVALUATION OF REPLANTING PROGRAM FOR INDONESIAN OIL PALM SMALLHOLDERS: CASE STUDY OF WEST ACEH REGENCY, INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

Our comprehensive study assessed the People's Palm Oil Replanting Program (PSR), also known as Program Peremajaan Sawit Rakyat, in West Aceh Regency, Indonesia. Employing qualitative research methods, this study conducted in-depth interviews with various stakeholders, including smallholders, representatives from the Agricultural Department of West Aceh Regency, and members of cooperative palm oil plantation committees. In complementing the primary data, this study incorporated secondary information from authoritative sources such as Statistics Indonesia, The Indonesia Oil Palm Plantations Fund Management Agency (BPDPKS), and relevant publications. Evaluation of this study was framed within the analytical framework that Donald Van Metter and Carl Van Horn developed in 1975. This framework encompassed vital dimensions, including standards and objectives formulation, resource allocation, inter-organizational communication strategies, enforcement mechanisms, implementing agency characteristics, contextual economic, social, and political factors, and program administrators' disposition. Our findings revealed significant implementation challenges, including ineffective inter-organisational communication, a perceived lack of commitment among implementers, and a lack of transparency in resource allocation. These issues raised concerns about the program's overall effectiveness. However, this study also highlighted a positive impact: The PSR contributed to reducing poverty rates in West Aceh Regency, showcasing its potential to enhance local socio-economic conditions.

Keywords: PSR evaluation, poverty reduction, program implementation, socio-economics impact, West Aceh Regency

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INTRODUCTION

Oil palm stands out as an economically valuable crop compared to other vegetable oils like olive,

sunflower, and corn (Yaşar, 2020). Indonesia's oil palm plantations covered 14.32 million hectares and produced 40.56 million tonnes of palm oil in 2019 (Indonesia Statistic, 2019). These plantations fall into two categories: Large-scale corporate plantations covering 8.51 million hectares and smallholders' plantations spanning 5.81 million hectares, contributing 39% of Indonesia's total palm oil production (Okarda *et al.*, 2018). Smallholders typically achieve lower yields, around 2.4 t/ha, compared to corporate plantations' 4.1 t/ha, possibly due to limited fertiliser application (Woittiez *et al.*, 2018). Also, old oil palm trees are a dilemma faced by Indonesian smallholders. According to the Indonesia Oil Palm Plantations Fund Management Agency (BPDPKS) (2021), 78%

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of smallholder plantations consist of trees that are between 17 and 27 years old. This situation contributes to lower productivity and inefficiency.

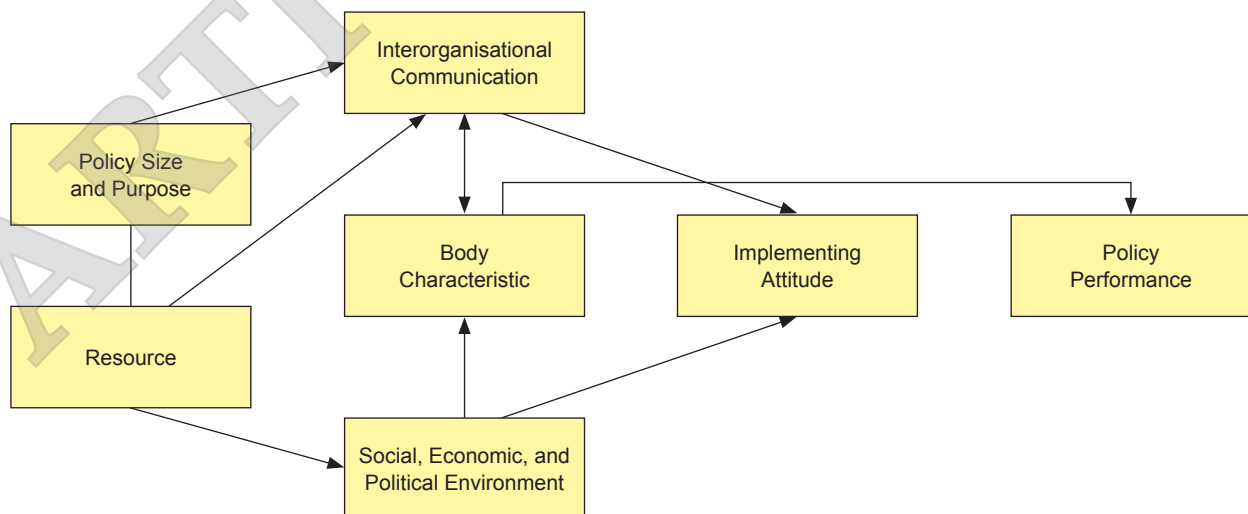
The Indonesian government is helping to increase the productivity of oil palm farmers. To boost smallholders' productivity, the Indonesian government initiated the replantation program (Petri *et al.*, 2023). The replantation program is aimed to reduce poverty level in rural areas and holds the potential to bring both social and economic benefits for the rural areas in Indonesia. The future of Indonesia's oil palm industry relies on smallholders (Saragih, 2017), and replanting aims to ensure its sustainability (Purba, 2019). Permentan No. 18 of 2016 defines replanting as replacing old or unproductive oil palm plants with new ones (Direktoral Jenderal Perkebunan Kementerian Pertanian, 2018). The government's policy seeks to enhance the community's economy by supporting smallholders with funds from self-help, banks, and other sources (Article 4 and Article 2, Permentan No. 18/KB.330/5/2016).

West Aceh Regency has been one of the recipient areas of the oil palm replantation program since 2018. This study is aimed to evaluate the program. "Top-level achievement standards and goals" refer to specific and overarching objectives set by authorities for policy evaluation (Novra *et al.*, 2022). These standards are precise criteria for assessing policy success. At the same time, goals encompass broader, long-term objectives aligned with regional or national development, such as food security, poverty reduction, sustainable land use, and economic and environmental benefits. Evaluation involves using various indicators and metrics, both quantitative and qualitative, to gauge progress and address challenges (Novra *et al.*, 2022).

According to Van Meter and Van Horn (1975), policy implementation success hinges on policy scope and objectives, resource availability, implementing organisation characteristics, inter-organisational communication, implementer disposition, and the broader socio-economic and political context. "Inter-Organisational Communication" involves information exchange between organisations to facilitate collaboration. "Policy Measures and Objectives" specify implementation metrics and goals. "Characteristics of the Implementing Body" refers to the executing organisation's attributes. "Resources" encompass necessary assets. "Attitude towards Implementation" reflects implementer disposition. "Policy Performance" assesses impact and efficiency. Lastly, "Social, Economic, and Political" factors shape policy outcomes, including societal, economic, and political influences (Van Meter and Van Horn, 1975).

Size and Purpose of Policy

The statement "In West Aceh Regency, the local government had proposed 2500 ha in 2021; however, it can be realised 1300 ha in 2019" appears to contain a temporal inconsistency. Assuming that the intended message is that in 2019, the local government successfully replanted 1300 ha of oil palm plantations, while in 2021, they proposed a more ambitious target of 2500 ha, several factors may explain this change. Firstly, policy adjustments could have addressed increasing concerns over environmental sustainability, economic development, or agricultural practices. Secondly, resource availability, funding, or technical capacity may have influenced the ability



Source: Van Meter and Van Horn (1975).

Figure 1. Model approach to the implementation of policies formulated.

to realise the proposed targets. The discrepancy may be due to a typographical error in the years mentioned.

In essence, this discrepancy underscores the dynamic nature of policy implementation, where goals and targets can evolve in response to changing socio-cultural, economic, and environmental conditions and the capacity and resources available for implementation.

Resources

The effectiveness of poverty reduction policies, such as the replantation program, is contingent on resource utilisation. Shortages in essential resources, including financial support, technical expertise, and skilled labour, can impede efficient policy implementation, as evidenced by Johnston *et al.* (2020). A need for more knowledgeable personnel has slowed the replantation process, affecting its quality and pace.

The financial component of the replantation program, overseen by the BPDPKS, plays a vital role in uplifting smallholders' livelihoods. It provides funding for replanting, enabling smallholders to invest in their plantations. Each hectare incurs a cost of 25 million Indonesian Rupiah. However, the efficacy of this financial aid hinges on proficient fund management and accessibility for smallholders.

Empirical evidence underscores the pivotal role of resources in poverty reduction policies. Resource inadequacies, especially financial support, technical know-how, and skilled labor, can impede policy execution. For instance, Johnston *et al.* (2020) highlight how the scarcity of experts has hampered the replantation program, potentially limiting its poverty reduction impact. Moreover, financial support from the BPDPKS holds promise in improving smallholders' livelihoods. Facilitating replanting enables smallholders to enhance yields and income. However, successful implementation relies on efficient fund management and equitable access. Mismanagement or limited access curtail the program's poverty reduction potential. Additionally, the emphasis on sustainable practices aligns with broader policy objectives related to environmental sustainability and economic development. Sustainable practices can bolster long-term economic stability for smallholders while contributing to regional economic and environmental sustainability.

In conclusion, policymakers must holistically address resource requirements for smallholder-focused programs. Besides financial support, facilitating access to technical expertise is critical. Investments in capacity-building and education can mitigate expertise shortages, augmenting the effectiveness of poverty reduction policies. Resource

allocation and utilisation are pivotal in smallholder poverty reduction efforts, necessitating resource gap mitigation for program success and sustainable development impact.

Characteristics of the Implementing Body

Implementing agencies' characteristics significantly impacts policy success, like the replantation program's role in the reduction of poverty especially in rural areas. Effective agencies exhibit expertise, ensuring adept handling of program complexities. Efficiency and accountability in resource management build public trust. Flexibility allows adaptation to changing circumstances. Coordination among institutions, such as fund providers, policymakers, implementers, distributors, and cooperatives, is vital for PSR alignment. Agencies' objectives should ideally support the PSR's vision, with fund management aiding smallholders. Effective coordination mechanisms, including communication channels and feedback loops, promote synergy among institutions, enhancing the likelihood of achieving PSR goals, particularly poverty reduction and sustainable development.

Communication between Organisations and Executors of Activities

Empirical evidence underscores the crucial role of effective communication in policy implementation, especially within Indonesia's Poverty Reduction Strategy. Given the limited formal education among many Indonesian farmers (Heryanda and Purbadharmaja, 2021), transparent and accessible communication channels are essential. Research consistently shows that well-executed communication with policy implementers dramatically improves the chances of achieving desired outcomes. Effective communication ensures that individuals understand the policy's standards and objectives, providing a clear path for action. This is particularly critical in poverty reduction efforts, where coordinated actions involving various stakeholders are necessary.

Empirical studies also highlight how communication breakdowns and misconceptions can lead to bottlenecks and inefficiencies in policy execution. When implementers need a comprehensive understanding of the objectives, aligning their actions with the intended goals becomes challenging, potentially resulting in suboptimal outcomes. In the context of the PSR, which aims to reduce poverty and improve the well-being of vulnerable populations, effective communication among policymakers, implementers, and beneficiaries is paramount. It ensures comprehension of policy standards and

objectives and their translation into actions that contribute to poverty reduction. Thus, fostering a culture of transparent and efficient communication within the policy framework is indispensable for achieving the overarching goals of poverty reduction and sustainable development.

Disposition or Attitude of the Executor

Empirical evidence underscores the vital role of policy implementers' disposition in successful policy execution, consistent with findings by Natesan and Marathe (2017). Research consistently demonstrates that the characteristics and attitudes of implementers significantly affect outcomes. Implementers with positive traits are more likely to align with policy objectives as intended by policymakers. Conversely, studies show that when implementers hold contradictory perspectives or dissenting opinions about policymakers and directives, the implementation process becomes complex and less effective. Discord can lead to resistance, delays, or deviations from the intended course, undermining policy outcomes. These findings stress the importance of selecting implementers with the necessary skills and a disposition that aligns with policy goals and policymakers' intentions. Effective policy execution relies on a harmonious, cooperative relationship grounded in mutual understanding and shared objectives supported by empirical research.

Social, Economic and Political Environment

Empirical evidence strongly emphasises the pivotal role played by the social, economic, and political environment in shaping the outcomes of public policy implementation, in line with Quitzow's insights from 2006. Numerous studies have consistently shown that the effectiveness of policies is profoundly influenced by the conditions prevailing in these domains. Economic stability, access to financial resources, and income distribution significantly impact the success of poverty reduction efforts. Similarly, political stability and social cohesion influence the

acceptance and impact of social programs. Policymakers must heed these contextual factors to craft policies aligned with their specific environment, enhancing the prospects of successful implementation. This study is aimed to evaluate the implementation of a replantation program in West Aceh Regency, Indonesia.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses qualitative research methods to evaluate a program implementation. The reason to use qualitative research methods is because it provides detail about social problems. Using an in-depth interview methods is a valuable tool for gaining a comprehensive understanding of PSR's implementation because it helps to answer complex questions, such as how and why efforts to implement may succeed or fail (Hamilton and Finley, 2019). In this study, the method used is qualitative method with a descriptive approach. Qualitative research aims to understand what phenomena are experienced by the subject to be studied, for example, behaviour, perception, motivation, and action holistically, and by way of describing words and language in a context (Moleong, 2006). Therefore, the qualitative approach can be used for a complex social research context.

Primary Data

Primary data was collected from observation and interviews with informants from three different sources identified as targeted respondents for this study as shown in *Table 1*.

This research collects primary data through a mixed-method approach involving observation and interviews with specific informants. Observations entail documenting on-ground activities related to the policy under study, including replantation practices, resource allocation, and implementation challenges. Interviews involve direct conversations with chosen informants, including the head of the Department of Agriculture in West Aceh Regency, a cooperative representative, and four oil palm smallholders.

TABLE 1. RESEARCH INFORMANTS

No.	Informants	Total
1.	Head of Department of Agriculture West Aceh Regency	One person
2.	Cooperative	One person
3.	Oil palm smallholders	Four people

Source: Ardian *et al.* (2018)

The selection of respondents is guided by criteria such as relevance, diversity, expertise, and availability. This ensures that informants have direct knowledge, offer diverse perspectives, possess relevant expertise, and are willing to participate, enhancing the validity and comprehensiveness of the collected data. Employing this comprehensive approach and selective respondent choice aims to gather a rich dataset. This dataset will enable a thorough evaluation of the policy's effectiveness and its impact on various stakeholders. Such a holistic analysis ensures the research captures various perspectives and nuances, providing valuable insights for informed decision-making and potential policy improvements.

Research Location

Arongan Lambalek is a sub-district in West Aceh district, Aceh province. This village is one of the replanting areas chosen by the BPDPKS, and the village received 44 ha of the PSR.

The framework involving government funds through the Ministry of Finance, the Indonesia Oil Palm Plantations Fund Management Agency (BPDPKS), national banks, local agricultural offices, and smallholder farmers is integral to the palm oil sector in Indonesia. Government funds support sector development and sustainability. BPDPKS manages levies and promotes industry competitiveness. National banks facilitate financial transactions and credit. Local agricultural offices oversee compliance and provide guidance. Smallholder farmers are at the heart of palm oil production, responsible for cultivation and adherence to sustainable practices. Together,

they form a comprehensive network supporting the growth and sustainability of the palm oil industry.

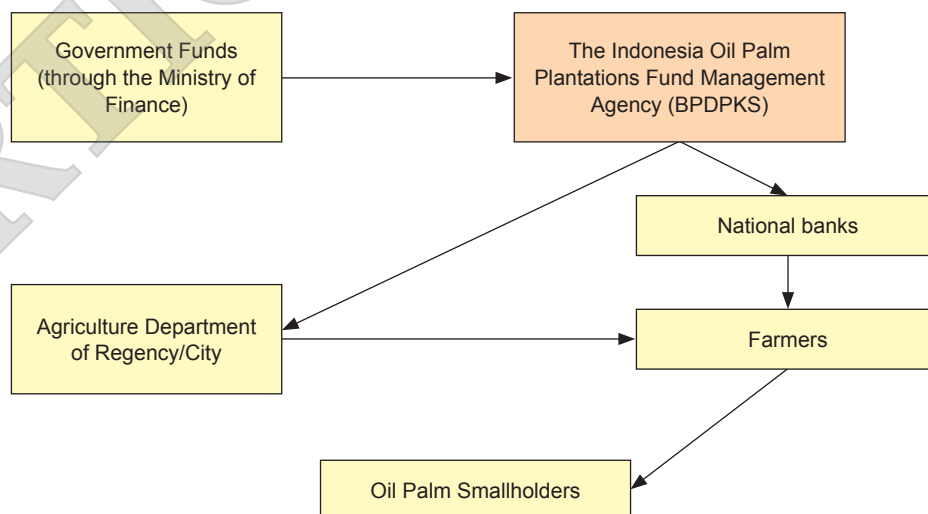
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of the PSR is the government's effort to develop smallholder oil palm plantations by replacing old or unproductive plants with new plants to help the people's economy. The program started in 2016 on the national stage. However, it was only commenced in West Aceh beginning 2018. An in-depth interview with informants has been conducted to gain information regarding the program's implementation to evaluate program implementation by using a model formulated by Van Meter and van Horn (1975).

Size and Purposes Policy on the People's Palm Oil Replanting Program (PSR)

Claims of the PSR success should be approached with a critical perspective, as highlighted by Mr. Mustafa, a local government officer. While the absence of immediate obstacles is positive, more is needed to provide a complete picture of success. A comprehensive evaluation of the PSR should include measuring its impact on poverty reduction, sustainable development, and equitable benefit distribution. Additionally, the effectiveness of socialisation efforts needs assessment to ensure community understanding and engagement.

Furthermore, statistics related to smallholders' farm sizes, program applications, participation rates, production levels, seed certification, and the reach



Source: The Indonesia Oil Palm Plantations Fund Management Agency (BPDPKS) (2020).

Figure 2. The flow of the People's Palm Oil Replanting Program (PSR) fund in West Aceh.

of socialisation efforts are crucial for a data-driven evaluation. Combining qualitative insights with these statistics provides a more informed assessment of the program's impact. A holistic evaluation is necessary to determine the PSR's overall success in West Aceh Regency.

The head of the farmer group who received the palm oil replanting program, Mr. Alwi, on 19 June 2021, said:

"The implementation of this program has been very successful so far; it has been carried out if you look at the oil palm, the palm trunks are large, but if we look further at the implementation process, actually this program has been promoted, and when it was promoted, it was explained how what is the procedure for accepting this palm oil replanting program, but you know for yourself that our people are still unfamiliar and do not trust the program because they are afraid that their land will be taken as the land certificate is one of the conditions for participating in the program."

The assertion that the PSR enhances smallholders' productivity in the West Aceh Regency requires empirical evidence. This evidence should encompass increased production, income, and adopting certified seeds and sustainable practices. Additionally, it is crucial to evaluate the program's long-term sustainability and the equitable distribution of productivity gains. A comprehensive assessment of the PSR's impact on smallholders' productivity demands an examination of these multifaceted factors. According to statistics data, the poverty rate has been decreasing steadily from 2019 to 2021 in West Aceh Regency. The oil palm plantation program has succeeded in increasing community income.

The Resources

The allocation of resources is an integral part of the success of implementing a policy, which includes human and financial resources, as conveyed by the informant, one of the recipients of the palm oil replanting program Van Meter and Van Horn (1975). The interview was conducted to explain the PSR fund the smallholders received.

The same statement was conveyed by the recipient of the program, Mr. Marzuki, on 22 June 2021:

"Beneficiaries like Mr. Abuyed provide concrete evidence of the PSR's positive impact. They receive new plants through replanting funding, boosting plantation sustainability. Mr. Abuyed's statement

about proper implementation and supervision reinforces the program's credibility. Distributing support through cooperatives ensures a structured, transparent process. This local success in Arongan Lambalek illustrates the PSR's effectiveness in empowering smallholders, promoting sustainability, and fostering economic growth in palm oil.

However, there is another opinion expressed by Mr. Abdurahman as the recipient of the program:

"Work began before Ramadan, primarily focusing on land clearance, but only 5 out of 24 ha have been addressed. The village head mentioned efforts to secure additional excavation services but acknowledged a need for tangible progress. Concerns arise as funds have been disbursed to beneficiaries without corresponding progress, prompting a need for a comprehensive investigation into this issue.

The incongruity between the established Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and the observed realities regarding the People's Palm Oil Replanting Program (PSR) eligibility criteria highlights a critical issue in policy implementation. While SOPs are designed to provide clear guidance and criteria for program access, there needs to be a specific and coherent SOP for the PSR raises concerns. Mr. Mustafa, the head of the community of oil palm replanting program in West Aceh, rightfully points out the lack of a dedicated SOP for the replanting initiative, emphasising the Keputusan Direktur Jenderal Perkebunan Nomor: 29/KPTS/Kb.120/2017.

This discrepancy underscores the importance of a comprehensive and well-defined SOP that aligns with the PSR's objectives and ensures consistent and equitable implementation. Even with a clear SOP, yet, there is a risk of misinterpretation, consistent application of eligibility criteria, and potential disparities in program execution. To enhance the program's effectiveness and fairness, policymakers must establish a robust and specific SOP for the PSR, providing a solid foundation for transparent, consistent, and successful implementation. Such clarity in eligibility criteria is essential for ensuring the program reaches its intended beneficiaries and achieves its poverty reduction goals.

The contrasting statements made by Mr. M. Nasir, the cooperative secretary, and Mr. Abuyed, a PSR recipient, regarding the maximum land allocation allowed under the PSR, underscore a significant issue in policy implementation. While Mr. M. Nasir suggests a maximum of 4 ha per

family, Mr. Abuyed's account reveals instances where individuals with more extensive land holdings exploit family cards to access the program, potentially breaching program rules. These inconsistencies signal a potential breach of SOPs and raise concerns about fairness and transparency in program execution. To uphold program integrity and ensure equitable distribution of benefits, robust SOP enforcement mechanisms, and effective oversight are imperative. This ensures that the PSR adheres strictly to its established SOPs, fostering transparency and fairness while advancing its objectives.

Communication between Organisations and Activities Implementer

Communication plays a pivotal role in policy implementation, and its significance becomes evident in the PSR process due to unclear information delivery. This miscommunication between PSR recipients and various stakeholders is discernible from the study. Mr. Mustafa, who oversees the Agriculture Department of West Aceh Regency program, shed light on the distribution process in his interview. He explained,

"The distribution process is facilitated directly to the community. Our cooperatives assist in ensuring the program's smooth operation, aiming to preempt any on-field challenges. The cooperatives are instrumental, operating under our supervision, with the intent of ensuring seamless program execution."

This statement underscores the importance of effective communication channels and cooperative involvement in program distribution while

maintaining supervision for optimal outcomes. However, Mr. Abdurahman posed different views as one of the advocates of the PSR as he said:

"The work is already underway, but it seems like it is being blocked in the middle of the road because it has been a long time even until now it is not clear why we have not started the process of logging our land, we have asked the group leader, but it is still the same as there is no definite answer regarding our land."

A similar assessment was echoed by Mr. Safrizal, a recipient of the PSR fund, who noted that while some progress had been made, land clearing remained incomplete, and the reasons for this were unclear. He suggested that the issue might not be related to fund availability, as the money had already been deposited in their bank accounts. However, a need for more understanding about the program persisted among many villagers in their community.

Examining statistics from the BPDPKS for 2020 revealed that the PSR's implementation has fallen short of its targets since its inception in 2016. For instance, in 2018, the program achieved only 12 611 ha out of a planned 180 000 ha. Similarly, in 2019, the target was 180 000 ha, but only 90 207 ha were realised. The actual realisation of the People's Palm Oil Replanting Program was 94 248 ha.

In summary, the assessment of communication in implementing the PSR in Arongan Lambalek District, West Aceh Regency, indicates that the program needs to improve in effective communication, leading to miscommunication in its implementation. *Table 2* illustrates that only 46.9 ha were covered under the PSR in 2020, further underscoring the program's communication-related issues.

TABLE 2. LIST OF RECIPIENTS OF PSR AT ARONGAN LAMBALEK DISTRICT WEST ACEH REGENCY IN 2020

No.	Name of farmers	Address	Land area (ha)
1	Ariyadi umar	Karak	4
2	Bukhari Jakfar	Peuribu	4
3	Dadang Fahrudin	Karak	4
4	Fikrizal	Karak	4
5	M. Saleh Idris	Keub	3
6	Marzuki The	Peuribu	4
7	Rahmad Hidayat	Karak	4
8	Rahmad Taufik	Karak	4
9	Razali Z	Arongan	3.7
10	Said Alwi	Peulanteu LB	4
11	Sulaiman Z	Peulanteu LB	0.6
12	Syarifuddin P	Peuribu	3.6

Source: Agriculture Department of Aceh Province (2020).

Disposition or Attitude of Executor

According to the decree from the Director for Plant Ministry of Agriculture No: 29/KPTS/KB.120/3/2017, cooperatives have a responsible action for replanting. Based on the disposition aspect interview, the PSR implementation did not go hand in hand because there were differences in the implementation and entry processes. As stated by Mr. M. Nasir, secretary of the Mandiri Jaya Beusare Cooperative, who works for land clearing until the replanting process or executor:

“Once the registration process is completed, we forward the list of applicants for replanting to the Department, followed by verification and land suitability assessments by relevant agencies. If the land is deemed suitable, we facilitate the creation of a bank account for the farmer. Once the funds are transferred, we initiate the replanting process, handling it comprehensively. Farmers receiving the program only need to oversee our work.”.

However, Mr. Safrizal as one of the program recipients, said:

“The progress of the work remains stagnant and has yet to advance beyond the initial logging phase. Additionally, he expressed concern about being excluded from the program if the initial work still needs to be completed. This situation significantly contrasts with what was conveyed during the program’s socialisation phase, indicating a substantial discrepancy between its promises and current status”.

Social, Economic and Political Environment

Policy implementation is also influenced by the social, economic, and political environment (Van Meter and Van Horn, 1975). Fundamentally, the impact of economic and political conditions on public policy has been the focus of attention over

the past decade. People comparing state politics and public policy are particularly interested in identifying the impact of economic, social, and political conditions on public policy, the focus of much attention during the last decade.

The national benchmark for poverty rates varies between countries, is determined by government authorities, and is typically based on income thresholds necessary to meet basic needs. Poverty rates are the percentage of people living below the national poverty line.

The objectives and benchmarks of a Poverty Reduction Strategy (PSR) are contingent on government or implementing agency goals. PSR aims to diminish poverty and enhance well-being. Benchmarks may encompass targets for income, access to education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and other poverty-related factors.

Whether a reduction of less than 1% is acceptable relies on factors like the initial poverty rate, PSR duration, and policy context. A minor reduction could sometimes signify significant progress, particularly with a low baseline poverty rate. Acceptability hinges on the specific circumstances and PSR’s broader objectives.

Table 3 indicates a declining poverty rate in West Aceh Regency, albeit higher than in Aceh Province and the national level. In 2021, it shows that declining of poverty in West Aceh Regency. This suggests the PSR’s role in reducing regional poverty, although it may still need to fully bridge social and environmental well-being gaps in oil palm-growing villages (Santika *et al.*, 2019).

CONCLUSION

The article concludes with several recommendations for the evaluation of the PSR program in West Aceh Regency. The program has begun in 2018 in Arokan Lambalek village. It received 44 ha of replantation. The People’s Palm Oil Replanting Program (PSR) is a government initiative to enhance the productivity of ageing or unproductive oil palm plantations in Indonesia. It was created in response to the low productivity of smallholders’ palm oil plantations, which adversely affected their income.

TABLE 3. PERCENTAGE OF POVERTY RATE IN INDONESIA, ACEH PROVINCE, AND WEST ACEH REGENCY

Year	Indonesia	Aceh Province	Aceh Barat Regency
2018	9.82	15.97	19.31
2019	9.41	15.32	18.79
2020	9.78	15.99	18.34
2021	10.14	15.33	15.33

Source: Indonesian Statistic Agency (2022).

Drawing upon the policy implementation framework outlined by Van Meter and Van Horn (1975), our evaluation of the PSR's implementation in the Arohan Lambalek district of West Aceh in 2018 revealed several challenges. These challenges included a need for more transparency in resource allocation, ineffective communication by implementers, and a perceived lack of commitment among program executors.

However, it is essential to note that our study did not provide clear evidence or arguments indicating the program's success in Aceh Barat Regency, particularly in poverty reduction. The findings did not substantiate the program's impact on poverty rates in the region, suggesting the need for further analysis and data to assess its effectiveness.

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