

Research Article

Gender Responsive Governance in Women's Empowerment in Surabaya City

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Abstract. Women's empowerment is an important agenda in inclusive development that positions women as both subjects and actors of development. This study aims to analyze the implementation of gender responsive governance in women's empowerment programs in Surabaya City, identify factors that support and hinder its implementation, and examine its contribution to increasing women's capacity and independence. The study used a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation involving the Office of Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, and Population and Family Planning (DP3APPKB), sub-district and village governments, women's organizations, and empowerment program participants. Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, which includes data condensation, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results of the study indicate that the principles of Gender Responsive Governance, including participation, responsiveness, inclusivity, accountability, and collaboration, have been integrated into various women's empowerment programs in Surabaya City. Program implementation is supported by local government commitment, policy support, and multi-stakeholder collaboration, but still faces obstacles such as low gender literacy, limited human resource capacity, and social and cultural barriers. The study also found that women's empowerment programs contribute to increased capacity, economic independence, social participation, and self-confidence for women. These findings underscore the importance of gender-responsive governance as an instrument for achieving more inclusive, participatory, and equitable development.

Keywords: Gender Equality; Gender Responsive Governance; Public Governance; Women's Empowerment; Women's Participation.

1. Introduction

Women's empowerment is now a key focus of development, both globally and nationally, to achieve just and inclusive governance. From a public administration perspective, women's empowerment is understood not only as an effort to increase the capacity of individual women, but also as a state responsibility to ensure equal access, participation, control, and benefits of development for women and men (Barman et al., 2026). This commitment is reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially the fifth goal related to gender equality, as well as various national regulations regarding gender mainstreaming (Siregar et al., 2023; Suryani & Putri, 2025). The concept of Gender Responsive Governance then emerged as an approach that integrates a gender perspective at every stage of government, from planning and budgeting to program implementation and policy evaluation. Gender-responsive governance is crucial because various forms of inequality persist in the economy, social life, politics, and public services. Therefore, government action is needed to ensure justice and equality for all citizens, regardless of gender (Firdaus & Wulandari, 2023).

In the Indonesian context, the implementation of Gender Responsive Governance is increasingly strengthened through various regional policies that encourage the integration of gender perspectives into government administration. One city that demonstrates a high level of dedication to this issue is Surabaya. The Surabaya City Government, through the Office of Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, Population Control, and Family Planning (DP3APPKB), proactively implements various programs for women's empowerment and

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gender integration. The DP3APPKB Strategic Plan for 2021–2026 states that women's empowerment, gender equity, and women's protection are the primary focuses of regional development. Implemented programs include developing creative businesses for women, strengthening gender mainstreaming institutions, providing women's protection services, and community-focused family economic empowerment (DP5A Kota Surabaya, 2024). In addition, the Surabaya City Government also launched the Gender-Responsive Neighborhood Program (RW) and the Women-Friendly and Child-Caring Village Program (KRPPA), which is targeted to reach all villages and thousands of RWs in Surabaya by 2024. This program aims to strengthen community participation in creating a friendly environment for women and children. These programs demonstrate that gender issues are not merely viewed as a sectoral issue but have become an element of more inclusive regional development management (Farhani & Falasifah, 2024).

Several previous studies have examined the implementation of gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment in various regions. Hanani et al. (2025) This study proves that the success of gender mainstreaming is largely determined by the quality of gender-responsive planning and budgeting and the support of local government institutions. Other research focuses more on assessing economic empowerment programs for women, protection for women and children, and the implementation of gender equality policies at the government agency level (Aruni et al., 2025; Purnama et al., 2023). However, many studies still see women's empowerment only as a program outcome and have not yet thoroughly examined how the principles of Gender Responsive Governance are applied in the process of managing local government, especially through interactions between the government, society, local communities, and other stakeholders (Kune et al., 2023; Kushandajani & Alfirdaus, 2019). Furthermore, research on the implementation of gender-responsive governance in Surabaya is still relatively limited, despite Surabaya being one of the cities that proactively incorporates gender issues into its regional development programs.

Based on this explanation, this study presents an innovation by positioning women's empowerment in Surabaya from the perspective of Responsive Feminist Governance, not merely a social program, but as a public management process encompassing aspects of participation, accountability, responsiveness, collaboration, and gender involvement in governance. This study aims to analyze how Gender Responsive Governance principles are applied in various women's empowerment programs conducted by the Surabaya City Government, the factors that facilitate and hinder their implementation, and their contribution to increasing women's capacity and independence. Therefore, this study is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of gender-based public administration studies and provide practical recommendations for local governments in strengthening more responsive, inclusive, and gender-equitable management.

2. Literature Review

Gender responsive governance is a management method that incorporates a gender perspective in every stage of government implementation, from planning, implementation, to evaluation of development policies and programs (Rilly et al., 2025). This approach arises from the understanding that neutral public policies often fail to adequately address women's needs and experiences. Goetz & Jenkins (2016), Gender-responsive governance focuses not only on women's representation in public institutions, but also on the government's ability to ensure that women have equal access, opportunities, and benefits from development. In public administration, gender-sensitive governance is a crucial tool for achieving inclusive, equitable, and gender-equality-focused development (Lwamba et al., 2022).

The implementation of gender-responsive governance is characterized by a number of main principles, namely participation, responsiveness, inclusivity, accountability, and collaboration (Nurhaeni et al., 2026). Participation refers to women's involvement in public decision-making, while responsiveness reflects the government's ability to address women's needs and issues through appropriate programs. Inclusivity emphasizes open access for all women without discrimination, while accountability relates to transparency and responsibility in program implementation. Collaboration is also crucial because achieving gender equality requires the participation of various parties, including the government, non-governmental organizations, universities, women's communities, and the business world (Brody, 2009). Thus, the success of gender-responsive governance is determined not only by official policies but also by effective collaboration between stakeholders.

The concept of Gender-Responsive Governance is strongly linked to women's empowerment. Kabeer states that empowerment is a process that enables women to gain access to resources, the ability to make decisions, and achieve desired outcomes (Kinati et al., 2022). In

the context of development, women who have access to education, training, information and economic opportunities will have a greater ability to improve the welfare of themselves and their families (Reshi et al., 2022). Thus, the implementation of gender responsive governance can be interpreted as the government's effort to create an atmosphere that supports women's empowerment, so that they can play an active role in social, economic, and political aspects and become a crucial element in the sustainable development process.

3. Research Methods

This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain a deeper understanding of the implementation of gender-responsive governance principles in various women's empowerment programs conducted by the Surabaya City Government. This approach was chosen because the research not only seeks to explain program implementation but also uncovers the management process, interactions between actors, factors influencing implementation, and the program's impact on increasing women's capacity and independence. This research was conducted in Surabaya City, with an emphasis on the Department of Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, Population Control, and Family Planning (DP3AP-PKB), as the regional government agency responsible for implementing women's empowerment policies and programs. Informants in the study were determined purposively based on their extent of involvement and knowledge of the programs studied. They included DP3AP-PKB officials, the gender mainstreaming team, representatives from sub-district and urban village governments, women's organizations, program facilitators, and women beneficiaries. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, field observations, and document studies related to policy documents, program reports, gender statistics, and relevant regional development planning documents (Pahleviannur et al., 2022).

Data analysis is carried out interactively based on the model Huberman & Miles (2012). This includes data collection, data consolidation, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions. The analysis focuses on three main aspects: the implementation of gender-responsive governance principles, including participation, responsiveness, inclusivity, accountability, collaboration, and gender equality in women's empowerment programs; the supporting and inhibiting factors for their implementation; and their contribution to increasing women's capacity and independence. To ensure data validity, the study employed source triangulation, method triangulation, and time triangulation by comparing information obtained from various sources and data collection techniques. In addition, verification was conducted with key informants to ensure that the researcher's interpretations reflected the actual situation (Ahmed et al., 2025; Sugiyono, 2017).

4. Results and Discussion

Implementation of Gender Responsive Principles in Women's Empowerment Program in Surabaya City

Observations indicate that the Surabaya City Government has incorporated a gender perspective into various women's empowerment programs coordinated by the DP3APPKB. In various training activities for entrepreneurship, MSME development, digital literacy, and the Women-Friendly and Child-Caring Village (KRPPA) program, women not only play a role as participants but also actively participate in identifying needs and developing activity agendas. Field observations indicate that women's empowerment forums at the village level are regularly used as a platform to express aspirations regarding economic needs, family education, women's protection, and job skills development. A DP3APPKB official revealed that programs are planned based on community needs analysis obtained from village meetings, women's forums, and collaboration with local organizations. This indicates the local government's efforts to ensure that programs are not uniform but tailored to the characteristics and needs of women in each region.

Interviews with program participants indicate that the majority of women experienced a transformation in their involvement in community development activities. Prior to joining the program, many participants stated that they primarily served as recipients of government information. However, after participating in various empowerment programs, they began actively submitting proposals, attending training, and participating in business groups and community forums. One female MSME owner revealed that digital marketing training provided by the city government helped her expand her product marketing network and increase her family business's income. Furthermore, several informants stated that the empowerment programs have created greater opportunities for women to engage in social and economic activities in their communities. This demonstrates that program implementation focuses not only

on capacity building but also on encouraging women's participation in previously limited public spaces.

Observations and interviews indicate strong collaborative practices in the implementation of women's empowerment programs. The Surabaya City Government does not operate alone, but involves women's organizations, communities, universities, business actors, and empowerment cadres at the local level. This collaboration is evident in the implementation of skills training, business mentoring, family health counseling, and other women's capacity-building activities. Furthermore, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are routinely implemented through activity reports, coordination meetings, and field guidance. Several informants noted that the local government is relatively receptive to input regarding program implementation, including suggestions and criticism from participants. These findings indicate that the implementation of women's empowerment programs in Surabaya focuses not only on service aspects but also strives to build participatory, inclusive, and collaborative management.

The results of the study indicate that the implementation of women's empowerment programs in Surabaya reflects the main principles of gender-responsive governance. According to gender-responsive governance theory (Rilly et al., 2025), Gender-sensitive governance is characterized by the ability of public institutions to incorporate women's needs, experiences, and expectations into the entire policy-making and public service process. In the context of this study, women's participation from the needs recognition stage to program implementation demonstrates a significant dimension of participation. This involvement is not merely symbolic, but also opens up opportunities for women to influence the direction of program implementation. This finding reinforces the view (Goetz & Jenkins, 2016) Gender-sensitive governance requires providing equal opportunities for women to participate in decision-making processes so that the resulting policies better reflect the needs of the target groups.

In addition to participation, research findings also demonstrate the dimensions of responsiveness, inclusivity, accountability, and collaboration, which are the foundation of Gender-Responsive Governance. Programs tailored to women's local needs reflect the government's ability to address the problems faced by communities in a contextual manner. The participation of diverse actors, such as women's organizations, universities, communities, and the private sector, demonstrates that women's empowerment is implemented through a collaborative management approach that transcends official bureaucratic boundaries (Mahardhani, 2023). In the view of modern public administration, this situation reflects a shift from a hierarchical model of government to a governance model that emphasizes collaboration and involvement of various stakeholders (Amirullah, 2024). Therefore, the implementation of the women's empowerment program in Surabaya City can be interpreted as a real example of gender-responsive governance that not only focuses on achieving program targets, but also on creating a more just and inclusive space for women in the regional development process.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors of The Implementation of Gender Responsive Governance

Interviews with DP3APPKB officials, sub-district officials, and program managers indicate that one of the main factors supporting the implementation of gender-responsive governance in Surabaya is the local government's strong commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment. Observations indicate that this commitment is evident in the existence of various programs specifically aimed at women, the integration of gender issues into regional development planning documents, and the establishment of inter-sectoral coordination mechanisms involving several regional government organizations. A DP3APPKB source explained that each women's empowerment initiative is designed to align with the regional development plan and gender mainstreaming targets established by the city government. Furthermore, support from regional leaders is considered crucial for maintaining program continuity, both through policy support, budget allocation, and inter-agency coordination. This situation allows women's empowerment programs to not operate in isolation but rather as part of a more comprehensive development strategy.

Another supporting factor is the strong collaborative network established between the local government and various stakeholders. Observations indicate that the implementation of women's empowerment programs often involves women's organizations, community groups, universities, the business sector, and local communities concerned with gender issues. Several informants stated that the collaboration supported increased access to training, business mentoring, capacity building for women's organizations, and the distribution of information to

the public. The presence of these actors also provided additional resources that local governments could not fully provide. One program facilitator stated that collaboration with universities and the private sector provided participants with opportunities for a wider variety of training, including business management, digital marketing, and product quality improvement. This research indicates that the program's success is influenced not only by government capacity but also by the ability to forge productive partnerships with various parties.

However, this study also identified various obstacles to the implementation of Gender-Responsive Governance. Interviews with program participants and implementers revealed varying levels of understanding of gender issues among the community and implementing officials. Some still view women's empowerment activities as supplementary programs not directly related to regional development. Conversely, several informants stated that not all program implementers have sufficient skills to integrate a gender perspective into activity planning and evaluation. Observations also indicated that women's participation in some programs is not optimal due to household responsibilities, limited time, varying levels of education, and unequal distribution of access to information. This situation makes it difficult for some women to consistently participate in programs despite their strong interest in participating.

The results of this study indicate that the implementation of Gender-Responsive Governance depends not only on the existence of official policies but also on the capacity of supportive institutions and the social environment. From a Gender-Responsive Governance perspective, political commitment and institutional support are crucial requirements for ensuring that women's needs and interests are integrated into the development process. The existence of regulations, special programs, and support from regional leaders in Surabaya City reflect a strong political will to support gender equality (Kamila, 2025). This finding is in line with the view Goetz (2003) which emphasizes that gender-responsive governance requires institutional support that can integrate gender perspectives into every stage of public policy, from planning to evaluation. Without a strong institutional commitment, women's empowerment programs have the potential to become merely symbolic administrative activities and lack meaningful impact.

Conversely, the challenges faced demonstrate that the transition to gender-sensitive management is a process that extends beyond administrative boundaries and also encompasses social and cultural aspects (Mwita, 2000). Low gender understanding, limited staff capacity, and the continued dominance of traditional roles within the household are challenges that can reduce the effectiveness of women's empowerment programs. From a modern public administration perspective, this situation demonstrates that effective gender-responsive governance requires an integration of institutional reform, strengthening human resource capacity, and transforming social values within society (Wicaksono, 2019). Therefore, developing gender training for officials, expanding public education on gender equality, and strengthening cooperation with community organizations are strategic steps to improve the quality of implementation of women's empowerment policies in the City of Surabaya in a sustainable manner.

Contribution of Gender Responsive Governance Towards Enhancing Women's Capacity and Independence

Observations indicate that various women's empowerment programs run by the Surabaya City Government have had a significant impact on improving women's individual capabilities. Through various training activities in entrepreneurship, digital literacy, family financial management, and micro-enterprise development, participants not only gained new knowledge but also opportunities to directly apply the skills learned. Interviews revealed that many informants reported improved abilities in managing their businesses, utilizing digital technology to market products, and developing better financial plans for their families. Several participants with no prior entrepreneurial experience stated that the training programs were a first step in identifying economic opportunities that could be developed in line with their existing potential. The research findings indicate that empowerment programs go beyond simply transferring knowledge and also play a role in enhancing women's ability to adapt to increasingly complex social and economic changes.

In addition to capacity building, interviews revealed significant transformations in women's economic independence. Several informants revealed that after participating in the empowerment programs, they began building businesses from home, expanding their sales networks, and earning additional income to support their families. Observations of several women's business groups indicate an increase in economic activity, as evidenced by increased product variety, increased use of digital media for marketing, and increased confidence in running independent businesses. One informant stated that before participating in the program, she

relied solely on her husband's income to meet household needs, but after receiving business guidance and training, she was able to earn her own income and participate in family economic decision-making. This indicates that the empowerment program has expanded women's access to economic resources and improved their bargaining position within their families and communities.

Another contribution found in this study is the increased social involvement of women in various community activities. Observations indicate that women who actively participate in empowerment programs tend to be more involved in community organizations, village deliberation forums, joint business groups, and other social activities. Interviews with several participants revealed that participation in the program has increased their confidence in public speaking, expressing their views, and participating in community activities. Some informants have even begun to be relied upon to serve as business group administrators, empowerment cadres, and facilitators for other women in their communities. These findings indicate that the program's impact is felt not only economically but also in increasing women's social capacity and leadership. In other words, the empowerment carried out by the local government has created opportunities for women to take a more active role in the development process at the local level.

The research findings can be understood through the lens of Gender Responsive Governance, which emphasizes the importance of creating an institutional environment that provides equal access, opportunities, and benefits to development for women and men. The research findings demonstrate that when women's needs are at the heart of program planning and implementation, public policy not only creates more focused services but also enhances the capacity of the individuals who receive them (Ningtyas, 2017). The improvements in skills, knowledge, and economic capabilities revealed in this study demonstrate that gender-sensitive management can create situations that enable women to optimize their potential. These findings align with the perspective of gender-responsive governance, which positions women as development actors who need to be given opportunities to participate, gain access to resources, and enjoy the fruits of development equitably (Mashudi et al., 2023).

In addition, the research findings also support the empowerment theory put forward by Kabeer, which explains that empowerment occurs through three main dimensions, namely access to resources, the ability to make choices, and the achievement of results (Henderson & Ross, 2025). In this study, various programs implemented by the Surabaya City Government have facilitated women's access to training, information, business networks, and institutional support. This access then triggers the development of capacity to make more independent decisions, both in economic and social aspects. The impact is evident in increased income, participation in public activities, and increased self-confidence in women's various roles in society (Hertika et al., 2025). Therefore, the contribution of gender-responsive governance is not only seen in the success of program implementation, but also in the transformation of women's capacity, social position, and independence, which are the main goals of the empowerment process.

5. Conclusions

This study indicates that the implementation of gender-responsive governance in women's empowerment programs in Surabaya City has been quite effective through the integration of the principles of participation, responsiveness, inclusivity, accountability, and collaboration in several programs managed by the local government. Women not only function as beneficiaries, but are also involved in the process of determining needs, implementing activities, and developing programs at the community level. The success of this implementation is supported by the commitment of the local government, solid leadership, the existence of gender mainstreaming policies, and collaboration between the government, community organizations, universities, and the private sector. However, this study also identified several challenges, including variations in understanding gender perspectives, limited human resource capacity, and social and cultural barriers that affect women's participation in empowerment programs. Nevertheless, the implementation of gender-responsive governance has been proven to have a positive impact on increasing women's capacity, economic independence, social participation, and self-confidence in social life. Based on these findings, the Surabaya City Government must improve the capacity of its apparatus through ongoing gender-responsive management training, increase gender knowledge in the community, expand women's access to technology-based empowerment programs and the digital economy, and strengthen inter-sectoral collaboration mechanisms so that the programs implemented do not only focus on achieving administrative targets, but are also able to produce more inclusive, sustainable, and gender-equitable social transformation.

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