

DYNAMICS OF SOCIAL ASSISTANCE RECIPIENTS IN ACHIEVE COMMUNITY ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE (A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY IN BONTANG CITY)

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the dynamics of social assistance beneficiaries in achieving economic independence of communities in Bontang City using a phenomenological approach. The research focuses on the experiences of recipients of the Family Hope Program (PKH) with 2,948 households, the Non-Cash Food Assistance Program (BPNT) with 4,788 households, and the Joint Business Group (KUBE) with 68 groups. Social assistance is regarded as an instrument of public policy that functions as a social safety net as well as a means of community empowerment. However, the field reality shows diverse dynamics of acceptance. Most PKH and BPNT beneficiaries use the assistance primarily for basic consumption needs, resulting in limited progress toward economic independence. In contrast, KUBE recipients have begun to demonstrate transformative efforts toward independence through productive business activities, although on a relatively small scale. The findings highlight that social assistance policies should not only focus on consumptive aspects but must also be integrated with empowerment programs to promote community economic independence, as emphasized in the theories of public policy (Dye, 2013), empowerment (Suharto, 2014), and economic independence.

Keywords: Social Assistance, Public Policy, Empowerment, Economic independence, Phenomenology

1. Introduction

Poverty remains a fundamental issue in national development as it is directly linked to both structural and cultural aspects of community life. This condition not only reflects economic limitations but also reveals barriers to access in education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and the weakness of social capital. Therefore, poverty alleviation strategies must be positioned as a comprehensive, sustainable development priority oriented toward reducing interregional inequality and strengthening the local potential of poor communities. In the context of accelerating poverty reduction, the Government of Indonesia has designed policies through several social assistance programs (Bansos), such as Direct Cash Assistance (BLT), the Family Hope Program (PKH), the Non-Cash Food Assistance Program (BPNT), and the Joint Business Group (KUBE). BLT is essentially a short-term protective measure aimed at maintaining household consumption among the poor during crises, disasters, or pandemics. PKH, on the other hand, seeks to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty by requiring access to education, healthcare, and nutrition among beneficiaries. BPNT focuses on strengthening food security and stabilizing the purchasing power of poor households. Unlike these programs, KUBE is directed toward productive economic empowerment by emphasizing group cooperation, self-reliance, and business sustainability. In Bontang City, the implementation of social assistance shows diverse dynamics. Some recipients feel supported as the assistance helps to reduce the burden of basic needs, in line with the social protection

function emphasized by Suharto (2014). However, many others demonstrate dependency, as highlighted by Hidayat (2020), who noted that PKH recipients often face social stigma and tend to be passive. Conversely, recipients who utilize social assistance for productive activities, particularly through KUBE, demonstrate the potential for transformation toward independence, as asserted by Chambers (1995) in his theory of empowerment. As an industrial and service-based region, Bontang has great potential to support social assistance beneficiaries in transforming into independent economic actors. Nevertheless, the consumptive patterns of some recipients remain a major challenge. The success of these programs is determined not only by the amount of assistance provided but also by accompanying support, the internal motivation of beneficiaries, and the surrounding socio-economic environment. Without integration with empowerment strategies, social assistance risks becoming merely temporary consumption, undermining the primary policy goal of achieving sustainable economic independence. This study aims to understand the dynamics of social assistance beneficiaries (PKH, BPNT, KUBE) in their efforts toward economic independence in Bontang City. The research focuses on the experiences of beneficiaries, their perceptions regarding program effectiveness, and the challenges that arise in utilizing the assistance. Using a phenomenological approach, this study seeks to uncover the meaning of beneficiaries' lived experiences to provide a comprehensive understanding of the contribution of social assistance to community economic independence.

2. Literature Review

Public Policy

Public policy is essentially the state's response to problems arising within society. Dye (2013) defines policy as everything the government chooses to do or not to do, which means that policy always reflects both political choices and strategies in protecting and empowering citizens. In the context of poverty, social assistance programs (bansos) represent a concrete manifestation of public policy. Dye's perspective is complemented by Dunn (2018), who emphasizes that public policy is dynamic because it undergoes cycles of formulation, implementation, and evaluation. Thus, the effectiveness of PKH, BPNT, and KUBE is not only determined during the planning stage but also depends on how the policies are implemented and evaluated. Furthermore, Nugroho (2014) views public policy as a strategic governance tool that requires community participation. This perspective underlines that the success of social assistance programs is not solely determined by the state, but also by the active involvement of the beneficiaries themselves.

Social Assistance

Social assistance is designed by the government as an instrument of social protection for poor and vulnerable groups. Suharto (2014) highlights that social assistance functions as a safety net to prevent families from falling into extreme poverty. In practice, social assistance has two dimensions: (1) a protective function, focusing on meeting basic needs as reflected in PKH and BPNT programs, and (2) an empowering function, directed at strengthening community economic capacity, as manifested in KUBE. The effectiveness of social assistance is strongly influenced by supporting factors such as social mentoring, recipient motivation, and community support. Without integration with empowerment strategies, social assistance risks remaining at a consumptive level and may fail to drive economic transformation.

Community Empowerment

Empowerment is understood as a structured process aimed at improving the ability of individuals and groups to manage their potential, access resources, and make decisions that affect their well-being. Ife (2002) describes empowerment as a process of enabling, empowering, and protecting, so that communities are able to achieve self-reliance in meeting their needs. Chambers (1995) frames empowerment as a shift from a condition of “being helped” toward “self-help.” This means that communities not only receive assistance but are also given the opportunity to participate actively. Zimmerman (2000) adds three dimensions of empowerment: intrapersonal (self-confidence and belief in one’s abilities), interactional (the ability to understand social contexts and utilize resources), and behavioral (the capacity to take concrete action). These three dimensions are highly relevant for assessing the extent to which social assistance has succeeded in enhancing community capacity toward independence.

Economic Independence

Economic independence is defined as the ability of communities to meet their needs without reliance on external parties. Kartasasmita (1996) stresses that independence occurs when individuals or groups are able to maximize their internal potential. Similarly, Sumodiningrat (2003) argues that independence emerges from empowerment processes that provide the courage and ability for communities to manage their assets. According to Mubyarto (2000), economic independence is the hallmark of a people’s economy based on local strengths. Therefore, economic development should not only be oriented toward growth but must also ensure sustainability, equity, and community autonomy in managing their livelihoods.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is an approach that emphasizes the importance of exploring the subjective experiences of individuals and groups. Husserl (1962) encourages researchers to “re turn to the things themselves,” meaning that phenomena must be understood as they are experienced by research subjects. In the study of social assistance, phenomenology provides space to trace how recipients interpret assistance, whether as a form of gratitude, a source of stigma, or a hope for self-reliance. Patton (2002) describes phenomenology as an effort to uncover the essence of a group’s experiences of a particular phenomenon. Therefore, this method is highly relevant for understanding the dynamics of social assistance recipients, not only at the level of technical policy but also in relation to the socio-psychological meanings accompanying their journey toward economic independence.

Conceptual Framework of the Research

The conceptual framework of this study illustrates that poverty, as a fundamental issue, drives the creation of public policy in the form of social assistance programs such as PKH, BPNT, and KUBE. PKH and BPNT serve a protective role in securing basic needs, while KUBE functions as an empowerment mechanism to promote productive enterprises. Through the support of mentoring, motivation, and the social environment, these programs are expected to strengthen community empowerment processes and ultimately achieve sustainable economic independence.



Figure 1. Research Framework
 Source: Processed data by the author, 2025

3. Method

Research Approaches and Techniques

This study employs a qualitative approach with a phenomenological research design. The phenomenological approach was selected because the research aims to explore the lived experiences of social assistance (Bansos) beneficiaries in their efforts to achieve economic independence. According to Creswell (2018), phenomenology is used to investigate the subjective experiences of individuals in depth to uncover the essence of a phenomenon. The validity of the data was strengthened through source triangulation and member checking. In the context of this study, phenomenology is relevant as the researcher seeks to understand how social assistance recipients in Bontang City interpret the assistance received, how

empowerment processes are implemented, and to what extent the assistance contributes to community economic independence.

Population and Sample

The study population consists of all social assistance recipients in Bontang City, including 2,948 households receiving the Family Hope Program (PKH), 4,788 households receiving the Non-Cash Food Assistance Program (BPNT), and 68 groups under the Joint Business Group (KUBE). In total, the research population amounts to 7,804 recipients. The research sample was determined through purposive sampling, whereby informants were deliberately selected based on specific criteria, including: being a Bansos recipient for at least two consecutive years, having real experience in utilizing the assistance either for consumptive or productive purposes, willingness to participate in in-depth interviews, and involvement of social facilitators or government officials familiar with program dynamics as supporting informants. The number of samples ranged from 10 to 15 main informants, consisting of PKH, BPNT, and KUBE recipients, supplemented by several key informants (social facilitators, village officials, or Social Service staff). The number of informants was determined until data saturation was reached.

Types and Sources of Data

Primary Data were obtained directly from the field by the researcher through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation with beneficiaries and related stakeholders. Secondary Data were collected from various existing sources, including official government documents, reports on social assistance programs, data from BPS Bontang City, relevant regulations, and academic literature (Widodo et al., 2023).

Data Collection

To obtain comprehensive data, several techniques were employed, namely: in-depth interviews with recipients, government officials, and social facilitators; participatory observation to directly observe the socio-economic conditions of beneficiaries and empowerment dynamics; and document studies of public policies, regulations, program reports, and statistical data related to social assistance and poverty in Bontang City.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the interpretative phenomenological model, which seeks to understand individuals' subjective experiences and the meanings attached to those experiences through qualitative data exploration, particularly in-depth interviews. The analysis process involved data reduction, namely filtering, selecting, and focusing on information relevant to the research objectives. Data presentation was carried out by organizing the data into narratives, matrices, or diagrams to facilitate interpretation. Essence extraction was conducted to uncover the core of informants' experiences regarding the dynamics of social assistance and economic independence. The analysis process was cyclical, with the researcher repeatedly reviewing the data to ensure consistency and validity of the findings.

4. Result and Discussion

This study aims to understand the dynamics of social assistance recipients in their efforts to achieve community economic independence in Bontang City. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 15 social assistance recipients and facilitators, field observations, and

documentation. The presentation of results focuses on experiences, perceptions, challenges, and the impact of social assistance on community economic independence.

Data Validation (Source, Technique, Time Triangulation, and Member Check)

The validity of the data in this phenomenological study was assessed using the criteria of Lincoln and Guba (1985), which include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was ensured through triangulation of sources, techniques, and time, as well as member checks with informants to verify the accuracy of the data against their lived experiences. Transferability was achieved through detailed contextual descriptions; dependability was maintained by implementing an audit trail of the research process; and confirmability was established by emphasizing that findings originated from field data rather than researcher bias. The implementation of each criterion was designed to remain consistent with the phenomenological design and field data sources (in-depth interviews with 15 informants, observations of 15 settings/locations, and official documentation). Thus, the findings of this study maintain scientific validity and reliability.

Table 1. Data Validation Test

Aspect (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)	Research Strategy	Application in the Study
Credibility	Source, technique, and time triangulation; member check	In-depth interviews, observations, and official documents; confirmation of findings with informants
Transferability	Thick description (contextual detail)	Presentation of detailed socio-economic conditions of Bontang communities and social assistance programs (PKH, BPNT, KUBE)
Dependability	Audit trail and peer debriefing	Documentation of the research process and discussions with supervisors/peers to maintain consistency
Confirmability	Documentation of empirical evidence and researcher reflexivity	Interview transcripts, field notes, and regulations related to social assistance used as the basis of findings

Research Findings

Table 2. Results of In-Depth Interviews

No	Informant Code	Category	Summary of Key Findings	Key Quotations	Brief Analysis
1	W01	PKH Recipient	Assistance greatly helps cover children's educational expenses.	"Alhamdulillah, one of my children has graduated from school. Without PKH, my child might have dropped out."	The protective function of social assistance is clearly evident.

Analysis of In-Depth Interview Findings

2	W02	PKH Recipient	Assistance helps improve household economy.	"It really helps with our family's daily needs."	Demonstrates the basic protection aspect.
3	W03	PKH Recipient	Assistance is helpful for kitchen needs and children's education.	"If the social assistance stops, we will struggle again to meet kitchen needs."	Shows dependency on assistance.
4	W04	BPNT Recipient	Assistance is useful but only for consumption.	"It runs out quickly, cannot be used for business."	Needs to be combined with productive economic empowerment programs.
5	W05	BPNT Recipient	Assistance supports basic needs but beneficiaries expect training.	"If there were training, maybe we could become more independent."	Indicates the need for integration between social assistance and empowerment programs.
6	W06	BPNT Recipient	Helps meet basic living needs.	"With the aid, at least we don't worry too much—it helps to buy rice."	Reflects protection of basic needs.
7	W07	BPNT Recipient	Helps meet family food needs.	"We feel assisted in meeting family meals."	Shows the protective role for basic needs.
8	W08	KUBE Recipient / PKH Social Facilitator	Assistance encourages small group businesses. The role of facilitators is crucial for motivating families.	"Through KUBE, I learned to start a sewing business." / "Without facilitation, many are reluctant to attend meetings."	The empowerment function begins to emerge. Facilitation is a key success factor.
9	W09	KUBE Recipient / KUBE Facilitator	Small capital assistance can increase income. Cohesive groups are more successful.	"Through KUBE, I could expand my sales and support my children's schooling." / "If members are united and supportive, the business grows."	Signs of economic independence are emerging. The social environment supports self-reliance.
10	W10	KUBE Recipient	KUBE program directed toward empowerment.	"I was given capital for a business I could run—selling	Empowerment leads toward independence.

				snacks—which really helped my family’s economy.”	
11	W11	PKH Facilitator	Beneficiaries still view PKH mainly as consumptive aid, not as a stimulus to improve living standards. Some remain passive and reluctant to strive further.	“I help guide beneficiaries to access basic services such as schools and health centers.”	Ensures program objectives are achieved so beneficiaries become empowered and independent.
12	W12	BPNT Facilitator	Social assistance is focused on basic protection.	“Our priority is to ensure that people do not go hungry.”	The protective function is the main objective.
13	W13	KUBE Facilitator	KUBE products still face market barriers. Cohesive groups perform better.	“Sometimes the products are not up to standard and lack competitiveness.” / “If members are united and supportive, the business grows.”	Capital assistance must be complemented with skills training. The social environment supports independence.
14	W14	Social Service Officer	Synergy with facilitators is essential.	“We need cooperation with facilitators for social assistance to be effective.”	Shows the importance of collaboration between Social Services and facilitators for program achievement.
15	W15	Social Service Officer	Hope that recipients will not depend on aid indefinitely.	“Social assistance should be a motivation for independence, not a source of dependency.”	Emphasizes the concept of social assistance as a stimulus rather than dependency.

1. Social Assistance as a Protective Function

Interviews with recipients of the *Program Keluarga Harapan* (PKH) and *Bantuan Pangan Non-Tunai* (BPNT) revealed that the majority of beneficiaries perceive social assistance as a form of basic protection to fulfill daily needs. Informant W03, for instance, emphasized: “*If PKH stops, we will be confused again in meeting our kitchen needs.*” Similarly, W06 stated: “*With the aid, at least we don’t worry too much—it helps to buy rice,*” and W07 noted: “*We feel assisted in meeting family meals,*”

highlighting that BPNT rice became the main reliance for household food security. These statements confirm that the short-term function of social assistance leans more toward protection or social risk mitigation. Theoretically, this aligns with Soeharto's (2009) view that social assistance serves as a protective instrument of the state to reduce the vulnerability of poor communities. These findings reaffirm that in the context of Bontang City, the protective role of social assistance remains dominant and represents the tangible presence of the government in shielding its citizens from extreme poverty. However, this protection tends to be temporary since most beneficiaries use the aid primarily for consumption rather than empowerment.

2. Social Assistance and the Challenge of Dependency

Although social assistance provides real benefits, some informants indicated symptoms of dependency. Informant W05, for example, expressed: *"If the aid stops, we will be confused again in meeting our kitchen needs."* This reflects a condition where recipients remain unable to escape the poverty cycle despite receiving regular aid. Furthermore, a social facilitator (W11) stated that beneficiaries still perceive PKH as consumptive assistance rather than a stimulus to improve family welfare, with some remaining passive, waiting, and reluctant to exert further effort. This dependency phenomenon can be explained through *dependency theory* (Frank, 1971), which suggests that external interventions not accompanied by empowerment strategies may perpetuate dependency. In other words, continued aid without clear empowerment mechanisms risks fostering a culture of dependency.

3. The Role of Empowerment Programs (KUBE)

Beyond its protective role, some beneficiaries involved in *Kelompok Usaha Bersama* (KUBE) experienced different outcomes. Informant W08 noted: *"Through KUBE, I learned to start a small shop,"* while W09 shared: *"From KUBE, I could expand my sales and support my children's schooling."* Similarly, W10 emphasized: *"I was given capital for a business I could run, and more sewing orders are coming in."* These statements demonstrate the transformation of social assistance from mere protection to empowerment. The KUBE facilitator (W09) stressed that group success strongly depends on solidarity and mutual support among members. This is consistent with Zimmerman's (1995) community empowerment theory, which highlights that empowerment outcomes are influenced by participation, social cohesion, and environmental support. Thus, KUBE in Bontang City has the potential to become a strategic instrument for fostering economic independence, although its scale remains limited.

4. The Role of Social Facilitators as Agents of Change

Another significant finding concerns the role of social facilitators. Informant W14 stressed: *"We need cooperation with facilitators for social assistance to be effective."* This suggests that facilitators serve not only as administrative intermediaries but also as motivators for behavioral change. Facilitators hold a strategic position in encouraging beneficiaries to move beyond passive reliance on aid toward active participation in training, meetings, and productive activities, thereby making social assistance more effective. From the perspective of Dye's (2013) public policy theory, policy implementation is determined not only by program design but also by the actors who execute it. Social facilitators act as key agents who bridge governmental objectives

with community realities, meaning the effectiveness of social assistance is heavily influenced by the quality of facilitation.

5. The Perspective of Social Service Officers: Between Limitations and Expectations

From the government's side, Social Service officers emphasized: *"Our priority is to ensure that people do not go hungry"* (W12). Meanwhile, W15 reiterated the expectation that: *"Social assistance should be a motivation for independence, not a source of dependency."* These statements reflect the awareness of program implementers that the ultimate goal of social assistance is not merely temporary protection but rather the creation of economic independence. This is consistent with Chambers' (1995) *community-based development* perspective, which stresses that successful development must be grounded in community strengths rather than solely reliant on government aid.

Table 3. Field Observation Results

No	Informant Code	Location/Setting	Observation Focus	Field Findings	Validity Notes
1	W01	House of Informant W01, PKH recipient	Socio-economic condition	Simple house, owns one well-maintained motorcycle, PKH assistance used for children's schooling	Consistent with interview, supportive
2	W02	House of Informant W02, PKH recipient	Utilization of PKH	Assistance used for daily food needs	Data consistent with informant's statement
3	W03	House of Informant W03, PKH recipient	Household economic activities / productivity	No significant economic activity, household relies on social assistance for basic needs; small food stall developed from social assistance	Economic condition consistent with interview; shows empowerment function (confirmability)
4	W04	House of Informant W04, BPNT recipient	Socio-economic condition / social environment	Recipient runs a laundry business, assistance used to help meet food needs; receives support from	Transferability maintained since situation can be generalized

				neighbors, stigma reduced	
5	W05	House of Informant W05, BPNT recipient	Economic condition	No independent business, dependent on social assistance	Member check consistent with interview data
6	W06	House of Informant W06, BPNT recipient	Facilitation	Works irregular jobs, assistance used for basic needs; facilitator actively motivates collective business initiatives	Assistance used for monthly food needs
7	W07	House of Informant W07, BPNT recipient	Utilization of BPNT	Family income allocated for water, electricity, gas, children's schooling, and other needs; social assistance supports household consumption	In line with regulations, credibility maintained
8	W08	House of Informant W08, KUBE recipient	Business challenges	Small tailoring business began to receive orders, but lacks motivation to join group meetings due to personal busyness; requires intensive facilitation	Confirmability: real issues observed in the field
9	W09	House of Informant W09, KUBE recipient	Group cooperation patterns	Cake business hindered by inadequate packaging; difficulty in unifying	Data consistent with interview statements

				opinions within group, requires focused facilitation per group	
10	W10	House of Informant W10, KUBE recipient	Group interaction	Mutual cooperation observed, collective food-snack business productive; meetings difficult but still managed	Strengthens interview results (credibility)
11	W11	Social Facilitator/PKH	Economic change	• Assistance helps cover basic needs. • Beneficiaries (KPM) still view PKH as purely consumptive aid, not as a stimulus to improve living standards. • Some beneficiaries misuse assistance, e.g., for debt repayment. • Dependency and lack of motivation to find other income.	Observation consistent with member check
12	W12	Social Facilitator/BPNT	Focus on basic protection	• Beneficiaries supported in meeting food needs. • Social stigma found in the community toward recipients of social assistance.	Transferability: social phenomena can be generalized

13	W13	Social Facilitator/KUBE	Empowerment and independence of recipients	Business requires group cohesion and marketing facilitation	–
14	W14	Social Service Officer	Collaboration with facilitators	Emphasized the importance of cooperation with facilitators in the field to ensure program effectiveness	–
15	W15	Social Service Officer	Focus on independence	Empowerment is expected to enable beneficiaries to achieve independence	–

Field Observation

Field observations at 15 research locations were conducted to ensure the consistency between interview data and the actual realities within the community. The results indicate that recipients of social assistance (PKH, BPNT, and KUBE) demonstrate variations in the utilization patterns of the aid. Most informants used PKH and BPNT assistance for basic needs, such as education and food, while KUBE was more directed toward productive activities through group enterprises or family micro-businesses.

From the credibility aspect, observations revealed consistency between interview data and factual conditions. For example, the utilization of PKH by Informants W01 and W02 aligned with the program's objectives, not only covering basic needs but also supporting children's education. This confirms that the collected data are valid and reflect the real-life experiences of beneficiaries.

The transferability aspect is evident in recurring social phenomena across several locations. For instance, the use of aid for daily consumption (Informants W02, W05, W06, and W07) as well as the presence of social stigma toward beneficiaries (Social Facilitator Informant W12). These phenomena are not limited to individual cases but can be generalized as part of the broader social dynamics of aid recipients.

Regarding dependability, data consistency was observed in the sustained patterns of aid utilization. For example, in KUBE groups involving Informants W08, W09, and W10, consistent mentoring patterns enabled collective businesses to remain operational. Conversely, in KUBE with Informant W13, lack of mentoring posed challenges that hindered business growth. This contrast highlights that the research results are auditable, as they have been thoroughly documented.

The confirmability aspect is reflected in the alignment of data with field realities. For example, Informants W08, W09, and W10 showed positive changes through the growth of small businesses, which were not only mentioned in interviews but also directly observed in the field. Thus, the research findings genuinely derive from empirical data rather than researcher bias.

Based on these observations, it can be affirmed that the validity test of data in this phenomenological study has been met according to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria. The research findings are not only valid but also scientifically accountable, as they are grounded in tangible evidence from the lived experiences of social assistance recipients in Bontang City.

Table 4. Documentation Results

No	Type of Document	Brief Description	Function in the Research
1	Data on Social Assistance Recipients	List of total social assistance recipients in Bontang City, totaling 8,076 individuals, consisting of 7,736 individuals and 68 groups.	Provides a quantitative overview of the coverage of the social assistance program.
2	PKH Recipient Data	List of recipients of the Family Hope Program (PKH) totaling 2,948 households.	Shows beneficiaries of social assistance with a protective function in education and health.
3	BPNT Recipient Data	List of recipients of the Non-Cash Food Assistance (BPNT) program totaling 4,788 households.	Illustrates social protection in meeting food security needs.
4	KUBE Recipient Data	List of groups receiving KUBE assistance, totaling 68 groups.	Highlights the role of social assistance in the aspect of productive economic empowerment.
5	Photos of KUBE Activities	Visual documentation of group business activities.	Provides evidence of community participation in productive activities.
6	Reports from Social Facilitators	Records of progress, challenges, and facilitation strategies.	Offers an operational perspective regarding the effectiveness of social facilitation.
7	Regulations on Social Assistance	Policy documents and technical guidelines for the program.	Serves as the foundation for program implementation and the direction of public policy.

Summary of Documentation Table Findings

The summary of documentation results above shows that administratively, the social assistance program in Bontang City already has a clear regulatory foundation, ranging from data collection through DTKS, budget allocation, to annual evaluation mechanisms. However, the document review also reveals a gap between policy and implementation. For example, although recipient data have been verified, inaccuracies remain, such as ineligible beneficiaries who are still listed as active. Moreover, photo documentation of KUBE activities and meeting reports indicate empowerment efforts through training and group work. Nevertheless, the scale and intensity of these activities are not fully proportional to the budget allocation, which is still dominated by consumptive assistance. This aligns with facilitator reports emphasizing that group success is strongly influenced by the intensity of facilitation and social interaction among members. Thus, documentation not only strengthens interview findings but also provides visual

and administrative evidence that the protective function of social assistance remains more dominant than its empowerment function. However, there are positive indications that through KUBE and intensive facilitation, some groups are able to move toward economic independence.

Discussion of Research Tables

Discussion of the In-depth Interview Table

In-depth interviews with 15 informants, consisting of social assistance recipients, program facilitators, and Social Service officers, provide a comprehensive picture of the dynamics of social assistance implementation in Bontang City. From the recipients' perspective, most stated that the assistance greatly helped in meeting household basic needs, particularly food and children's education costs. This affirms that the protective function of social assistance remains highly relevant and tangible for the community. However, several recipients highlighted targeting issues, such as cases where ineligible beneficiaries continued receiving assistance. Other concerns related to the limited amount of assistance, which has yet to match the needs of poor households. These findings demonstrate a gap between policy design and on-the-ground implementation, as well as evidence of dependency. From the facilitators' perspective, interviews showed that program success largely depends on the intensity of facilitation and recipients' active participation. Facilitators observed that recipients with strong motivation to become independent are more successful in utilizing empowerment programs, such as KUBE. However, low group interaction and limited entrepreneurial skills often become obstacles to accessing markets and achieving economic independence. Meanwhile, Social Service officers emphasized the importance of periodic verification and validation mechanisms. They acknowledged technical challenges in data updates, which result in targeting inaccuracies. At the same time, the Social Service seeks to strengthen empowerment aspects through skills training. Overall, the interview results highlight the gap between the protective and empowerment functions of social assistance. On one hand, assistance sustains the livelihoods of the poor, yet on the other hand, major challenges remain in transforming consumptive aid into a sustainable empowerment instrument. This aligns with community empowerment theory, which stresses the importance of continuous, participatory, and community-driven processes to achieve economic independence.

Discussion of the Field Observation Table

Field observations reinforce interview findings by highlighting recipients' actual behaviors and activities. PKH and BPNT beneficiaries primarily used the aid for consumption and children's education, with minimal additional economic activity. For example, Informant W03 emphasized: *"If PKH stops, we will struggle again to meet food needs."* Similarly, Informant W06 noted: *"With the assistance, at least we are less worried and can buy rice,"* and W07 said: *"We feel helped in meeting family food needs."* These statements confirm that, in the short term, the function of social assistance leans more toward protection or risk mitigation. In contrast, KUBE recipients demonstrated active participation in productive activities, such as running food stalls, tailoring, and small livestock farming, which improved skills and income potential. Informant W08 stated: *"Through KUBE I learned to open a small stall,"* while W09 explained: *"From KUBE I was able to expand my business and support my children's schooling,"* and W10 added: *"I was given capital to start a business I can run, sewing, and now I am receiving more orders."* KUBE facilitators (W09) emphasized that group success depends heavily on solidarity and mutual support. This finding is consistent with Ife's (2002)

theory of community economic independence, which argues that independence depends not only on assistance but also on individual motivation, access to resources, and social support. Furthermore, field observations demonstrated that facilitation plays a crucial role in fostering participation and productivity among KUBE groups. This supports empowerment theory, which highlights that interaction between facilitators and groups builds decision-making and business management capacity, thereby increasing the likelihood of achieving economic independence.

Discussion of the Documentation Table

Research documentation consists of various types of data reflecting the implementation of social assistance in Bontang City, including data on the total number of recipients, data on PKH, BPNT, and KUBE recipients, photos of KUBE activities, reports from social facilitators, and regulations serving as the policy basis. Collectively, these documents provide a comprehensive overview of social assistance dynamics from administrative, implementative, and normative perspectives. Data on the total number of recipients illustrates the extent of government intervention in reaching poor and vulnerable groups. The high number of beneficiaries indicates that social assistance remains a primary instrument of social protection strategies. At the same time, this condition also highlights a relatively high dependence on aid, which must be balanced with empowerment efforts. PKH recipient data shows the program's protective orientation, emphasizing children's educational rights and maternal and child health. This program helps sustain access to basic services for the poor and prevents intergenerational poverty. Similarly, BPNT data highlights the food protection dimension, which is vital for ensuring household subsistence. Both programs empirically demonstrate the contribution of social assistance to basic welfare. Unlike PKH and BPNT, which are protective, KUBE data reflects a more productive orientation. Through group-based enterprises, beneficiaries are directed toward developing productive economic activities. Photos of KUBE activities reinforce evidence that the program extends beyond financial distribution to active community engagement in collective businesses, which potentially enhances economic independence. Reports from social facilitators are equally valuable, presenting program dynamics in the field, including challenges, strategies, and achievements. These reports show that facilitators' roles go beyond administration to motivational and educational functions, strengthening program effectiveness. Finally, regulations related to social assistance provide legal legitimacy and clear policy direction, ensuring that government interventions have a strong legal basis and are aligned with community needs. Overall, documentation reveals not only the scale and distribution of recipients but also how social assistance functions as a public policy instrument. The combination of protective programs (PKH, BPNT) and productive programs (KUBE) demonstrates a dual role of social assistance: sustaining poor households while also encouraging pathways to economic independence.

5. Conclusions

PKH and BPNT maintain basic welfare but have limited impact on independence. These programs consistently help meet basic needs, particularly children's education and household food consumption. Based on interviews and observations, PKH beneficiaries used the funds for school fees, books, and supplies, while BPNT recipients utilized food packages to ease household burdens. Thus, both programs are effective in reducing short-term economic vulnerability and ensuring fulfillment of basic needs. However, their impact on economic independence remains limited, as recipients tend to remain dependent on regular aid, without significant sustainable economic capacity building. This aligns with social policy literature

stating that consumptive assistance acts as a stabilizer but does not always produce long-term economic transformation for recipients (Dye, 2013; Ife, 2002). Unlike PKH and BPNT, KUBE is a productive program aimed at group business development. Interviews and observations reveal that KUBE recipients engage in productive economic activities, such as food stalls, handicrafts, livestock, and culinary businesses, generating additional income. Active group participation and facilitator guidance enhanced managerial capacity and cooperation, promoting progress toward independence. This supports Zimmerman's (2000) empowerment theory, which emphasizes the importance of participation, control, and capacity-building as foundations of economic independence. Social facilitators serve as a bridge between beneficiaries and government, providing guidance, motivation, and monitoring. Field data show that KUBE groups with active facilitation are more productive and more likely to achieve independence. Meanwhile, PKH and BPNT recipients with less motivation or minimal facilitation tend to remain passive and dependent. This underscores that social facilitation is a strategic component for ensuring empowerment and independence. A synergy of consumptive and productive assistance is required for sustainable independence. Findings emphasize the need for combining consumptive programs (PKH, BPNT) and productive programs (KUBE). Consumptive assistance ensures basic welfare, while productive assistance promotes economic independence. The synergy of both creates a dual effect: beneficiaries not only meet basic needs but also develop entrepreneurial capacity and sustainable income. This strategy aligns with theories of economic independence, which stress integrating resources, motivation, and social support to achieve sustainable independence (Ife, 2002; Zimmerman, 2000).

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