

PUBLIC POLICY TO ADDRESS ECONOMIC INEQUALITY IN BENGKULU: CASE STUDIES AND SOLUTIONS

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Abstract. *Economic inequality in Indonesia, including in Bengkulu Province, is a complex problem that affects social welfare and economic stability. This study aims to analyze public policies that have been implemented to address economic inequality in Bengkulu, with a focus on infrastructure development, education, health, and poverty alleviation programs. This study uses a qualitative approach with case studies in several areas in Bengkulu that represent economic inequality. Secondary data were obtained from official reports from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the Ministry of Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and other sources. The results of the study indicate that although various policies have been implemented, such as infrastructure development and increasing access to education, inequality between regions, especially between urban and rural areas, is still quite significant. In addition, poverty alleviation programs and MSME empowerment have a positive impact, but are not yet optimal in equalizing the distribution of welfare. Evaluation of existing policies shows the importance of improvements in implementation and collaboration between the government, society, and the private sector. More integrated and sustainable policy recommendations are needed to reduce economic inequality and create more equitable development in Bengkulu.*

Keywords: *Economic Inequality, Infrastructure Development, Poverty Alleviation, Public Policy.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia as a developing country faces a number of challenges in achieving equitable development throughout its territory. Although Indonesia has experienced positive economic growth nationally, economic inequality remains a significant problem. This inequality is reflected in the striking differences between the western and eastern regions, between large islands such as Java and Sumatra and other regions, both in terms of income, employment opportunities, quality of education, and access to basic services such as health. This inequality not only hinders the achievement of social welfare, but also has the potential to worsen social and political tensions.

One measure often used to describe economic inequality is the Gini Index, which shows the imbalance in income distribution in society. Although Indonesia's Gini Index figures have shown improvement in recent years, inequality between regions remains high. According to Ilham (2018) based on Theil's Entropy calculations, it is known that most provinces in Indonesia are classified as high economic inequality (based on the median value of 34 provinces). Regions outside Java, especially those with limited natural resources, infrastructure, and market access, tend to lag behind in economic development. This leads to income inequality and quality of life that are very pronounced in society.

Bengkulu Province, located on the west coast of Sumatra Island, is one example of a province that faces significant economic inequality. Despite having quite large natural resource potential, such as palm oil plantations, rubber, and tourism potential, Bengkulu is still underdeveloped compared to other provinces in Sumatra.

Economic development in Bengkulu experiences a striking disparity between coastal and inland areas. Communities in urban areas such as Bengkulu City enjoy a better level of development with easier access to basic services and employment. On the other hand, people in inland areas far from government and economic centers face difficulties

in gaining access to education, health, and decent employment opportunities. This condition hinders the distribution of welfare and worsens socio-economic inequality in Bengkulu.

Economic inequality in Bengkulu can be seen from various dimensions, which raises a number of fundamental problems that must be addressed through effective public policies. One of the main problems that needs to be answered is what are the factors causing economic inequality in Bengkulu? Economic inequality in Bengkulu requires serious attention from the government, both at the provincial and central levels. Therefore, it is important to know what public policies can be implemented to address economic inequality in Bengkulu.

This study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the economic inequality that occurs in Bengkulu and to identify public policy solutions that can be applied to reduce this inequality. Specifically, the purpose of this paper is to explain the causes of economic inequality in Bengkulu by looking at the structural factors that cause income disparities between regions, to analyze public policies that have been implemented in Bengkulu in an effort to reduce economic inequality, and to provide more appropriate policy recommendations in overcoming economic inequality in Bengkulu.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Understanding Economic Inequality

Economic inequality can be defined as a condition in which there is inequality in the distribution of income, wealth, and access to economic resources in a society. In this context, economic inequality is not only limited to differences in income between individuals, but also includes inequality in access to economic opportunities, education, health services, and natural resources. Economic inequality can occur at various levels, both between individuals, between social groups, and between regions within a country or province.

According to experts, economic inequality is the difference in the distribution of income and unequal opportunities between various groups in society. Smith and Todaro (2006) state that income inequality is the difference in income generated or received by society, while according to Baldwin (1986), income distribution inequality is the difference in economic prosperity between the rich and the poor, while according to Sukirno (2006), income distribution is a concept that discusses the distribution of income for each person or household in society.

One of the most frequently discussed types of inequality is income inequality. Income inequality refers to large differences in the incomes received by individuals or groups in society. This inequality is often measured using indicators such as income ratios, the Gini coefficient, or the percentage of income earned by a particular group in society. Income inequality can be caused by factors such as differences in education, skills, geographic location, and access to the labor market.

In addition, inequality can also occur in development. Development inequality refers to differences in the level of development between regions or areas within a country. In this case, some areas experience high levels of economic growth and good infrastructure, while other areas lag behind due to lack of investment and supporting facilities. This development inequality causes a gap in the quality of life between urban and rural areas, which ultimately worsens social and economic inequality.

2.2. Economic Theories on Inequality

Classical economic theory, known for its figures such as Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and John Stuart Mill, basically proposes the view that economic inequality is the result of free market mechanisms. In the classical view, the market will naturally allocate resources to the most productive individuals or groups. Income inequality is seen as a consequence of differences in skill levels, capital, and the ability to innovate. Therefore,

inequality is seen as inevitable in capitalist societies, but is still considered a driving force of economic efficiency.

However, this classical economic theory has been criticized in the Keynesian theory developed by John Maynard Keynes. According to Keynes, economic inequality is not only the result of differences in individual productivity, but is also related to imbalances in aggregate demand and unequal distribution of income. Keynes emphasized that income inequality can worsen the problems of unemployment and economic instability. In the Keynesian view, government intervention in the form of fiscal and monetary policies is very necessary to improve economic inequality and encourage more equitable growth.

As the global economy has evolved, contemporary theories on economic inequality have also emerged. Some of them highlight globalization, technology, and labor market structures as factors causing increasing inequality. Globalization, which opens up access to international markets, has widened the gap between developed and developing countries, while technological advances, especially in the digital sector, have resulted in inequality in terms of skills and access to better quality jobs. Technology benefits skilled and highly educated workers, while low-skilled workers tend to be increasingly marginalized. In addition, contemporary economic theories also emphasize the importance of redistributive policies to reduce widening inequality.

In addition, fiscal policies designed to reduce economic inequality can include allocating budgets to programs that directly target poor communities. These policies can take the form of social assistance, education subsidies, or health financing. This pro-people fiscal policy aims to create better economic equality, especially for those who are economically disadvantaged.

2.3. Public Policy and the Role of Government

Public policy is a decision taken by the government in order to regulate, influence, or direct community activities to achieve certain goals. In the context of economic inequality, effective public policy can function to reduce social and economic disparities in society. This public policy must be inclusive and pay special attention to groups in society that are most affected by inequality, such as the poor, marginalized groups, and disadvantaged areas.

One way to reduce economic inequality through public policy is to strengthen infrastructure development in underdeveloped areas. The government can invest in the construction of roads, bridges, transportation systems, and communication networks that can connect remote areas with economic centers. This infrastructure improvement will open market access for people in remote areas, facilitate the distribution of goods and services, and increase the economic competitiveness of the region.

Education and skills training is also an important public policy to reduce economic inequality. By increasing access to quality education, the government can provide greater opportunities for people to improve their skills and abilities, so that they can compete in the job market.

The government also plays a role in managing natural resources more fairly. Most of the economic inequality in Bengkulu, for example, can be overcome by more transparent and fair management of natural resources, so that the benefits can be felt by the wider community. Programs that support the development of the agricultural and plantation sectors in a sustainable manner, and ensure a more equitable distribution of income from these sectors, will help reduce economic inequality.

On the other hand, pro-growth and pro-equity fiscal policies also play a very important role. The government can set a progressive tax policy, meaning that the higher a person's income, the greater their contribution to taxes. The taxes received can then be allocated to social programs that support improving the quality of life of the poor and increasing their economic opportunities. This policy can also include allocating the

budget to sectors that support equitable development, such as education, health, and infrastructure development.

With various targeted policies, the government can create more equitable economic opportunities, which will ultimately reduce economic inequality and create a more prosperous society.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

Qualitative research method with case study approach used in this article aims to analyze public policies implemented to address economic inequality in Bengkulu Province, focusing on policies that have been and are being implemented, as well as evaluation of their impact. This approach was chosen because it can provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of economic inequality in Bengkulu through analysis of policies implemented in the area. This research is also supported by secondary data obtained from various official sources and relevant literature.

Data analysis was conducted using a descriptive analytical approach. This approach is used to identify factors that cause economic inequality in Bengkulu, as well as to evaluate policies that have been implemented to address the problem. The data that has been collected is analyzed by identifying emerging patterns, both in policies that have been implemented and in the community's response to the policy.

Analysis is also conducted to assess the extent to which public policies implemented in Bengkulu have succeeded in reducing economic inequality. The targets set in the policy will be compared with the results achieved in the field. This is done by referring to indicators of economic development, such as unemployment rates, poverty, and income distribution between regions. By using this data, an objective assessment of the success of the policy can be provided.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Result

1. Analysis of Economic Inequality in Bengkulu

Economic inequality in Bengkulu Province is reflected in the uneven distribution of income and resources between existing regions. Based on available statistical data, there is a significant gap between cities and villages, as well as between various economic sectors. Bengkulu City, as the provincial capital, shows a much higher income level compared to other regions, especially those in the interior or more isolated areas. This indicates a clear inequality in the distribution of resources and economic opportunities. Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (2024), per capita income in Bengkulu City (IDR 45,150 thousand) is higher than regencies such as Lebong (IDR 21,040 thousand), Kaur (IDR 19,104 thousand), and Mukomuko (Rp. 18,711 thousand) who historically have had more limited access to economic centers and adequate infrastructure. According to Afif (2022), the faster or higher the rate of economic growth, the higher the level of income inequality.

This income inequality is also reflected in the imbalance of the economic sectors that dominate in each region. The plantation and agricultural sectors that are the mainstay in the interior of Bengkulu, such as rubber and oil palm plantations, often do not generate income comparable to the industrial and trade sectors that are more developed in Bengkulu City. This causes the income of rural communities to be lower and trapped in a less productive economic pattern and dependent on commodities whose prices are often unstable in the global market. Meanwhile, the service, trade, and construction sectors in Bengkulu City are growing more rapidly, which widens the economic gap between regions. This economic inequality hinders the potential for development and threatens the sustainability of economic growth. The factors that cause this inequality in general include demographic conditions that have differences, unequal education conditions, lack of employment opportunities, and differences in social status in society (Putri et.al, 2023)

In addition, economic inequality in Bengkulu can also be seen from the differences in access to infrastructure. Coastal areas and large cities have better access to roads, electricity networks, and communication facilities, which support more efficient and productive economic activities. In contrast, inland and more remote areas often lack basic infrastructure, which hinders economic growth and causes low community incomes. This underdeveloped infrastructure also reduces the competitiveness of local products and worsens the economic gap between more developed and less developed areas.

Natural resources, although a great potential of Bengkulu, do not always provide benefits evenly to the entire community. The agricultural and plantation sectors that rely on natural resources are unable to reach all levels of society fairly. In some cases, the benefits of these sectors are often only enjoyed by a handful of parties who have access to capital and markets, while the majority of the community remains in poverty. Limited access to markets and financing makes it difficult for people in remote areas to maximize their economic potential.

Educational inequality is also an important factor contributing to economic inequality in Bengkulu. Access to quality education is still limited, especially in remote areas. Although the government has made various efforts to improve education, the quality of education received by people in remote areas is still far from adequate. This has an impact on the low quality of human resources in the area, which in turn affects their competitiveness and economic potential.

2. Impact of Economic Inequality

The impact of economic inequality in Bengkulu is greatly felt by the community, especially in terms of quality of life. One of the main impacts is poverty which continues to be a major problem in less developed areas. Based on BPS data, a number of districts in Bengkulu still have high poverty rates. Economic inequality contributes to the high number of people living below the poverty line, especially in rural and remote areas. Lack of access to quality education, adequate health services, and decent employment opportunities makes it difficult for most people to escape poverty.

The impact of this inequality is also seen in the health sector. In more isolated areas, health facilities are often inadequate, and many people have to travel long distances to get proper care. This leads to low levels of public health, especially among poor families. Unequal access to quality health services leaves many people without adequate care and hampers the government's efforts to achieve inclusive health development goals.

In the education sector, economic inequality has an impact on the low level of education participation in rural areas. People in these areas often face difficulties in accessing higher education due to limited educational facilities and lack of funds to finance education. This unequal education creates a cycle of poverty that continues, where the younger generation is hampered in accessing better economic opportunities.

Economic inequality also affects overall economic development. Underdeveloped regions that do not have sufficient access to infrastructure, markets, and capital struggle to develop their economic potential. This results in low economic growth in these regions, which in turn exacerbates income inequality and slows down equitable development. In addition, this inequality is often associated with high unemployment, where people living in economically underdeveloped regions struggle to find adequate employment. In addition, economic inequality also has the potential to hinder inclusive political participation. Marginalized communities tend to have less say in the decision-making process, which ultimately worsens existing social and economic disparities. Therefore, it is important for the government to take effective steps to create equitable development so that people from various social strata can feel fair benefits.

The impacts of economic inequality show the importance of government efforts to formulate public policies that focus not only on economic growth, but also on the equitable distribution of development outcomes. Inclusive policies that focus on reducing

economic inequality will have a positive impact not only on improving the quality of life of the community, but also on creating better social and political stability in Bengkulu.

3. Policies Focusing on Infrastructure Development

One of the main policies implemented in Bengkulu to reduce economic inequality is infrastructure development, which is a key factor in economic equality between regions. Good infrastructure will encourage the mobility of goods, services, and human resources, thus connecting isolated areas with economic centers. Road construction, such as trans-provincial roads and inter-district connecting roads, is part of a program aimed at facilitating the distribution of goods and facilitating public access to markets, public facilities, and education and health centers. In previously isolated areas, this infrastructure development opens up new economic opportunities for the community, enabling them to increase their income and quality of life.

In addition, transportation development is also a policy focus in Bengkulu. The Bengkulu Provincial Government has made efforts to improve the public transportation network, including the improvement and development of ports, airports, and bus terminals. This improvement in the quality of transportation is expected to reduce the cost of distributing goods and facilitate tourist access, which in turn will accelerate the growth of economic sectors based on tourism and trade. The growing transportation sector also has the potential to open up new jobs for the local community.

4. Policies in the Field of Education and Health

The Bengkulu Provincial Government also realizes the importance of the education and health sectors as factors that influence economic inequality. Therefore, policies in the fields of education and health have been designed to equalize the quality of services received by the community, especially in disadvantaged areas.

In the education sector, local governments have launched various programs to improve the quality of human resources (HR). One of them is a free education program for children from poor families through the Smart Indonesia Card (KIP). This program provides assistance to students to cover education costs, from school fees to transportation costs. In addition, the government also implements various skills training to improve the work capacity of people in disadvantaged areas. This training focuses on skills that are relevant to the needs of the labor market, such as training in the agricultural sector, handicrafts, and information technology.

In the health sector, government policies are focused on equalizing health services. The Healthy Indonesia Card (KIS) program was introduced to provide free access to health services for the poor. This program aims to ensure that all Bengkulu residents, especially those in remote areas, can access medical services without any cost barriers. The government is also improving health facilities in these areas, building more modern health centers, and providing sufficient medical personnel. Improving the quality of health services is a priority so that people can enjoy a healthy and productive life.

However, even though education and health policies have provided significant benefits, challenges remain in terms of equalizing quality. In some remote areas, the quality of education and health facilities still needs to be improved. Especially in rural areas, the limited number of qualified educators and medical personnel is a problem that hinders the achievement of equality.

Discussion

Evaluation of public policies implemented in Bengkulu shows mixed results. In terms of infrastructure development, this policy shows significant progress, especially in reducing disparities between regions. The construction of roads and transportation makes it easier for people to access markets, educational facilities, and health services. However, as mentioned, there are major challenges in funding and coordination between institutions that hinder the distribution of infrastructure throughout Bengkulu.

In the field of education, although policies such as KIP and skills training have succeeded in increasing access to education in disadvantaged areas, the quality of education in many areas still requires more attention. One of these is improving teacher competency and improving school facilities in remote areas. This requires greater efforts in training and bringing in quality teachers and improving existing educational infrastructure.

In the health sector, policies such as KIS and the development of community health centers have succeeded in increasing access to health services for the poor. However, the problem of uneven distribution of medical personnel is still a major obstacle in equalizing the quality of health services throughout Bengkulu. In addition, health education and disease prevention in remote areas also need to be strengthened to reduce mortality rates and improve the quality of life of the community.

Overall, although the public policies implemented in Bengkulu have had a positive impact, there is still much work to be done to address the existing economic inequality. The government needs to continue to innovate and collaborate with various parties to ensure that these policies provide maximum benefits for the entire Bengkulu community.

Cases of Economic Inequality in Kaur Regency and Bengkulu City

Bengkulu as one of the provinces in Indonesia has quite significant economic disparities between districts/cities. One of the areas that reflects this disparity is Kaur Regency and Bengkulu City, which represents the difference between rural areas and city centers in Bengkulu Province.

Table 1. Comparison of Indicators between Bengkulu City and Kaur Regency in 2023

No.	Indicator	City of Bengkulu	Kaur Regency
1	Percentage of Province Area (%)	0.75	12.96
2	Distance to Provincial Capital (Km)	0	200
3	Realization of Regional Income (million rupiah)	1,167,218.16	796,624.50
4	Realization of Regional Expenditure (million rupiah)	1,100,613.54	783,122.91
5	Labor Force (people)	193,783	67,342
6	Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR) (%)	66.61	68.44
7	Main Job Fields		
	1. Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries	14.175	37,889
	2. Mining and Quarrying	31,025	3,490
	3. Wholesale and Retail Trade	138,816	23,400
8	Open Unemployment Rate (%)	5.04	3.81
9	Poverty Line (rupiah/capita/month)	810,507	415,715
10	Percentage of Poor Population (%)	14.71	17.83
11	Human Development Index	83.38	70.92
12	Construction Cost Index	94.07	95.39
13	Average Expenditure per Capita per Month (Thousand Rp)		
	Food	745.60	623.77
	Not Food	1,040.33	485.98
14	Percentage of Expenditure per Capita per Month (%)		

	Food	41.75	56.21
	Not Food	58.25	43.79
	Expected Food Pattern (PPH) Food		
15	Consumption Score Value	86.2	86.5
16	GRDP at Constant Prices (B Rupiah)	17,658.93	2,503.82
17	GRDP Growth Rate at Constant Prices (%)	5.53	3.4
	GRDP per Capita at Constant Prices		
18	(Thousand of Rupiah)	45.150	19.104
	GRDP Growth Rate per Capita at Constant		
19	Prices (%)	3.86	2.13
20	Gini Ratio	0.38	0.29

(Source: BPS Bengkulu Province, 2024)

Kaur Regency, located in the southern part of the province, is one of the areas that is still lagging behind in terms of infrastructure development and access to markets. Although this area is rich in natural resources, such as agricultural and plantation products, the poverty rate in Kaur remains high. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) shows that the poverty rate in Kaur (17.83%) is higher than the poverty average in Bengkulu Province (14.04%). One of the main causes of economic inequality in Kaur is the lack of accessibility to wider markets, low quality infrastructure, and limited access to education and health for the community. Most of the population in this district works in the agricultural sector, which is highly dependent on weather conditions and market price fluctuations. This makes the community vulnerable to poverty.

Bengkulu City, as the provincial capital, shows a very different condition. Although income inequality within the city is not as large as in rural areas, there is a clear difference between residents living in the city center and those in the suburbs. The economic sector of Bengkulu City is more developed with the presence of trade, services, and public sector industries. However, economic inequality is also seen from the very different income levels between workers in the formal and informal sectors. While the formal sector tends to be more productive with higher wages, most residents of Bengkulu City work in the informal sector, which is often not protected by social security and has a lower income.

The disparity between the two regions, namely Kaur Regency and Bengkulu City, shows a clear disparity in terms of economic development, infrastructure access, and human resource quality. Therefore, policies implemented by the provincial and regional governments need to be more focused on equitable development so that these disparities can be minimized.

Weaknesses and Successes of Policies in Kaur Regency and Bengkulu City

In relation to the policies that have been implemented to address economic inequality in Kaur Regency and Bengkulu City, some successes can be seen in the development of certain sectors, although there are still many challenges that need to be overcome.

The success of the policy in Kaur Regency can be seen in the local government's efforts to improve basic infrastructure, such as building roads connecting villages to trade and transportation centers. The provincial government has also channeled funds for the development of the agricultural sector, by providing training to farmers on more efficient and environmentally friendly agricultural techniques.

However, despite the successes in infrastructure and the agricultural sector, the policies implemented in Kaur Regency have not been fully successful in significantly reducing economic inequality. One of the main weaknesses is the limited access of the community to markets and technology, which makes it difficult for farmers to increase their production and income.

In Bengkulu City, policies that focus more on developing the trade and industry sectors, as well as improving city infrastructure, have had a positive impact on the regional economy. The development of public facilities and the provision of better transportation services have supported higher connectivity between regions, while the trade sector has grown thanks to more efficient shopping centers and markets. The Bengkulu City Government has also taken various initiatives to reduce social disparities by providing social assistance to poor families and increasing access to education and health.

However, weaknesses in the policies implemented in Bengkulu City are also clearly visible. The income gap between the formal and informal sectors is still very large. Many workers in the informal sector do not have social security and decent wages. In addition, although transportation infrastructure and public facilities are improving, the gap between the city center and the suburbs is still clearly visible. People living in the suburbs tend to have difficulty accessing basic services and better public facilities, which contributes to economic inequality.

In both cases, although local governments have launched various policies aimed at reducing economic inequality, the main unresolved problem is equal access and opportunity. Economic inequality is not only caused by differences in income, but also by limited access to resources and opportunities. Therefore, more holistic and integrated policies are needed to reach all levels of society, especially those living in remote areas or in the informal sector.

More effective policy implementation must also involve stronger synergy between local and central governments. In this case, the allocation of funds for the development of disadvantaged regions must be given more attention, and supervision of policy implementation must be carried out more strictly to ensure that the allocated budget is truly used for the benefit of the community. The local government in Bengkulu needs to strengthen its administrative capacity so that it can design and implement policies that are more targeted and have a direct impact on reducing economic inequality.

In addition, investment in infrastructure that supports accessibility and connectivity between regions must continue to be increased. The government needs to ensure that infrastructure development is not only centered in large cities, but also covers more remote areas. This will open up greater economic opportunities for people in these areas, so that existing disparities can be reduced. Policies that prioritize equitable development must also be directed to encourage community involvement in the development process, both as workers and as business owners.

Overall, more coordinated and regionally-based public policies should be a top priority to create a more inclusive and equitable economy in Bengkulu. Through integrated, transparent, and sustainable efforts, economic inequality that has been an obstacle to regional progress can be overcome, and more equitable economic development will be achieved.

Policy Recommendations to Address Economic Inequality in Bengkulu

1. Improvement of Infrastructure and Connectivity

Infrastructure development is one of the important steps to overcome economic inequality, especially in underdeveloped regions. In Bengkulu, there are still many isolated areas due to lack of connectivity between regions. One of the main steps that must be taken is the development of a transportation network that connects underdeveloped regions with economic centers. The construction of roads, bridges, and adequate public transportation facilities in all districts and cities in Bengkulu can facilitate the distribution of goods and services. Better access will increase trade efficiency and increase opportunities for local business actors to access wider markets.

Furthermore, the development of digital infrastructure is also important to improve connectivity in the digital economy era. Providing equal internet access throughout the region, especially in rural and remote areas, will improve people's ability to access

information, run businesses, and participate in the digital economy. Programs such as the development of village internet infrastructure must be a priority. The development of this technology-based infrastructure will not only reduce economic inequality, but can also create new opportunities in the digital economy sector and technology-based MSMEs.

2. Increasing Access to Education and Training

One of the factors contributing to economic inequality in Bengkulu is the low quality and access to education, especially in remote areas. Therefore, improving the quality and equality of access to education should be a policy priority. Inclusive education programs that can accommodate children from underprivileged families should be strengthened. Providing adequate educational facilities, such as more schools in rural areas, and training for teachers to be able to teach with more effective methods, can improve the quality of education in disadvantaged areas.

In addition to formal education, skills training is also very necessary to improve the competitiveness of the workforce, especially for the younger generation in Bengkulu. Training that focuses on practical skills such as digital, managerial, and technical skills will expand job opportunities and create wider employment opportunities. Local governments can work with the private sector to provide market-based training that can address local economic challenges. Skills training programs for sectors such as modern agriculture, fisheries, and tourism, which are potential sectors in Bengkulu, will be very useful for reducing economic inequality.

3. Economic Diversification

To reduce economic inequality, it is important for Bengkulu to develop economic diversification. Relying on only one economic sector, such as agriculture or mining, can make the regional economy vulnerable to price and weather fluctuations. Therefore, policies to develop other potential economic sectors, such as tourism, fisheries, and the creative industry, must be strengthened. The government can provide incentives to investors to develop these sectors in underdeveloped areas, as well as provide training for local communities to improve their skills according to market needs.

4. Improvement of Health and Social Systems

The health sector is one of the important elements in reducing economic inequality. Healthy people have greater potential to participate in economic activities and improve their quality of life. In remote areas, access to health services is often limited. Therefore, policies that prioritize the development of health facilities in these areas must be strengthened. The development of hospitals and health centers, as well as the provision of equitable health facilities, are very important to ensure that all people, especially those in rural areas, can enjoy quality health services.

In addition, there needs to be more effective social programs to reduce poverty and social inequality. Therefore, a more accurate data collection system and more efficient aid distribution need to be improved. Community economic empowerment programs, such as women's group empowerment and skills training, also need to be expanded to provide opportunities for poor families to increase their income.

CONCLUSION

Economic inequality in Bengkulu is a complex and multi-dimensional problem. Based on the analysis that has been done, the main factors causing economic inequality in this province can be categorized into several main aspects. One of them is the imbalance in infrastructure development which causes certain areas to become isolated and do not have adequate access to economic centers. In addition, differences in access to quality education and skills training between cities and villages are also significant factors causing inequality. In some areas, low quality education and limited skills training

facilities hinder the improvement of the quality of human resources, which in turn prevents them from accessing better job opportunities.

To effectively address economic inequality, policies must focus on an inclusive development approach, which not only pays attention to economic growth, but also to the equitable distribution of development outcomes. The government must ensure that every policy implemented, whether in the infrastructure, education, health, or economic sectors, can provide equitable benefits to all levels of society, without leaving anyone behind. In addition, it is important to adopt a data-based approach and analysis of local needs, which allows policies to be tailored to the conditions and potential of each region.

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