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## Suburban Poverty in Indonesia: Policy Innovation in Combating Extreme Poverty in Kampar Regency

Yusdiyen Hadinata<sup>1</sup>, Agus Joko Pitoyo<sup>2</sup>, Hakimul Ikhwan<sup>3</sup>, Dewi Haryani Susilastuti<sup>4</sup>

### Abstract

*This study investigates the dynamics of extreme poverty concentrated in suburban areas of Kampar Regency, Riau Province, Indonesia. Using a mixed-method approach, including Structural Equation Modeling (SEM-PLS), in-depth interviews, FGDs, and policy analysis, the research explores the characteristics of extremely poor households, underlying factors of suburban poverty, current policies, and innovations implemented to address these issues. Results reveal that extreme poverty is prevalent in aging households with low education, marginal farming income, limited access to credit, and weak social capital. Despite policy efforts, structural barriers, misaligned indicators, budget constraints, and sectoral egos impede effectiveness. The study highlights innovative local responses such as PULUT KETAN and PESIAR and offers policy recommendations aimed at contextualized, community-based interventions. This article contributes novel insights into the under-researched phenomenon of suburban poverty in developing countries.*

**Keywords:** Extreme Poverty, Suburbanization, Policy Innovation, Indonesia, Kampar Regency, Mixed Methods.

### Introduction

Despite consistent global economic growth and advances in human development, extreme poverty continues to persist in many parts of the world. According to the UNDP (2023), over 1.1 billion people still live below the extreme poverty line of US\$1.90 per day. While poverty has traditionally been associated with rural areas, recent spatial dynamics reveal a growing concentration of poverty in suburban and peri-urban areas regions previously perceived as development buffers between urban wealth and rural deprivation (Allard & Paisner, 2016).

In Indonesia, a country often praised for reducing national poverty rates, a paradoxical trend is emerging. National data show a declining poverty rate of 9.36% as of early 2023 (BPS, 2023), yet pockets of extreme poverty remain alarmingly persistent, especially in transition zones between urban and rural areas. One such example is Kampar Regency in Riau Province, where extreme poverty is most concentrated in suburban districts surrounding the capital city, Bangkinang (TNP2K, 2022).

Suburban zones like Kampar, Salo, and Bangkinang exhibit hybrid characteristics: neither fully urban nor traditionally rural. These areas have undergone a quiet but profound agrarian transition, shifting from rice farming and rubber plantations to less stable forms of land use such

<sup>1</sup> Doctoral Student at the Graduate School, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, Email: [hadinatayusdiyen@gmail.com](mailto:hadinatayusdiyen@gmail.com), (Corresponding author).

<sup>2</sup> Lecturer at the Graduate Program, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Email: [aguspit@ugm.ac.id](mailto:aguspit@ugm.ac.id)

<sup>3</sup> Lecturer at the Graduate Program, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Email: [hakimulikhwan@ugm.ac.id](mailto:hakimulikhwan@ugm.ac.id)

<sup>4</sup> Lecturer at the Graduate Program, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Email: [dewi.pasca@ugm.ac.id](mailto:dewi.pasca@ugm.ac.id)



as smallholder oil palm cultivation or informal urban services. This dislocation has left many residents in precarity, unable to sustain traditional livelihoods nor access urban employment opportunities (Widada et al., 2023).

Most anti-poverty policies in Indonesia remain grounded in rural or urban classifications, neglecting the unique structural and sociocultural dynamics of suburban poverty. National programs such as the Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH) and Bantuan Langsung Tunai (BLT) are based on income-based targeting, often overlooking the relational and spatially embedded nature of deprivation in suburban zones (Yuliansyah, 2022). This mismatch highlights a gap in current development paradigms that privilege bounded geographical typologies over lived socio-spatial realities.

A posthumanist perspective prompts a rethinking of poverty not merely as a lack of income or material goods, but as a product of entangled human and non-human relations land, technology, policy, and cultural narratives. Scholars like Rosi Braidotti (2019) emphasize the need for relational ontologies in policy design, arguing that interventions must recognize the multiple, overlapping systems ecological, institutional, and affective that shape human vulnerability. This framework is particularly relevant to suburban poverty, which sits at the intersection of ecological degradation, socio-political exclusion, and economic dislocation.

While structuralist theories highlight institutional failures such as poor infrastructure or labor market exclusion (Murphy, 2010), sociocultural approaches like the Membership Theory (Durlauf, 2006) underscore how community norms, peer influence, and historical marginalization reinforce intergenerational poverty. In Kampar's suburban communities, families entrenched in low-income informal work and social exclusion often replicate cycles of deprivation, not solely due to lack of resources but due to deeply rooted perceptions of opportunity and value.

One major challenge in addressing suburban poverty lies in the inadequacy of poverty measurement tools. As Sugiharti et al. (2022) argue, standardized indicators such as expenditure per capita or caloric intake often fail to capture the multidimensional and context-specific nature of poverty. In Kampar, indicators such as access to health care, social capital, and land tenure play a critical role in determining household vulnerability, yet these dimensions are underrepresented in national databases.

In response to these gaps, local governments in Kampar have initiated innovative programs such as PULUT KETAN (Perlindungan Pekerja Rentan) and PESIAR (Petakan, Sisir, Advokasi, Registrasi). These community-based interventions utilize participatory mapping, social advocacy, and inclusive governance to identify and assist marginalized groups. Such innovations exemplify the potential for localized, non-bureaucratic approaches to challenge state-centric, technocratic models of welfare delivery (Sachs & McCord, 2008).

This article seeks to contribute to the evolving discourse on suburban poverty by unpacking the specific characteristics, causes, and policy responses to extreme poverty in Kampar Regency. Positioned within a posthumanist framework, the study argues for a reconceptualization of poverty as relational, contextual, and systemic. By integrating quantitative evidence with grounded qualitative insights, this research offers a nuanced portrait of poverty that challenges simplistic binaries of rural/urban or state/community, calling instead for hybrid, adaptive governance mechanisms.

## Literature Review

### *Conceptualizing Suburban Poverty*

Suburban poverty refers to the phenomenon of concentrated deprivation in areas that are geographically and functionally transitional between urban centers and rural peripheries. This spatial condition often results in the overlapping of multiple vulnerabilities: erosion of rural livelihoods, lack of urban infrastructure, and the absence of coherent policy attention (Murphy & Allard, 2015). In contrast to traditional urban poverty, suburban poverty is shaped by the flux of urban expansion, agrarian displacement, and infrastructural gaps.

In the United States and parts of Europe, suburban poverty has been associated with the decline of manufacturing jobs, suburban sprawl, and racial segregation (Lewis-McCoy, 2023; Raphael & Stoll, 2010). In Indonesia, however, the phenomenon is intertwined with rapid urbanization and uneven regional development. Suburban zones like Kampar, while geographically close to cities, are often left out of formal development plans, resulting in economic informality and spatial exclusion (Widada et al., 2023).

These suburban spaces embody contradictions. On one hand, they are viewed as expansion zones for urban development. On the other hand, their inhabitants often displaced farmers or informal laborers struggle with unstable incomes and lack of public services. This tension reflects what Simone (2004) calls "interstitial urbanism," where people survive in zones of ambiguity with limited state support.

From a posthumanist angle, suburban poverty challenges anthropocentric development logic. Rather than viewing poverty as solely a human deficit, scholars like Latour (2005) and Braidotti (2019) argue that we must understand how infrastructures, spatial arrangements, and policies themselves co-produce poverty. Thus, suburban poverty is not just a symptom of economic failure, but a manifestation of broken assemblages between humans, systems, and environments.

### *Determinants of Extreme Poverty in Transitional Zones*

Suburban poverty is shaped by multifactorial drivers. Structurally, the lack of public infrastructure, weak land tenure systems, and fragmented service delivery contribute to chronic deprivation (Nurwati, 2008). Economically, the transition from agrarian to informal urban livelihoods often leads to underemployment, low wages, and precarious work conditions (Kedir & McKay, 2005). Socially, exclusion from decision-making structures and limited access to education further reinforce marginalization.

Culturally, the persistence of poverty is also sustained by the normalization of low expectations. Durlauf's (2006) Membership Theory explains how people socialized in environments of deprivation tend to internalize poverty as a life norm. This is exacerbated in suburban areas where new social support networks are weak or absent. Bowles (2006) adds that collective action becomes difficult in moderately unequal communities due to lack of cohesion.

Environmental degradation adds another dimension. The conversion of agricultural land into industrial or residential zones not only displaces farming households but also increases living costs due to reduced self-sufficiency. Simultaneously, urban waste and pollution disproportionately affect these transitional zones, compounding vulnerability (Pribadi & Kartiasih, 2020).

Lastly, the political dimension is significant. Suburban areas often fall through the cracks of

jurisdictional governance. Policy responsibility may be unclear between municipal and rural authorities, leading to governance gaps. As Ridho et al. (2014) note, the lack of political access and representation among poor suburban communities means their needs are frequently ignored in budget allocations and planning documents.

### ***Critiques of Mainstream Poverty Alleviation Policies***

Mainstream poverty reduction programs, especially in developing countries, rely heavily on economic indicators and top-down implementation. While programs like PKH and BLT offer short-term relief, they often fail to address structural causes of poverty (TNP2K, 2022). Moreover, such programs are typically designed with rural or urban typologies in mind, neglecting the distinct needs of suburban populations.

Critics argue that these programs suffer from "technocratic reductionism," where poverty is viewed narrowly as income deficiency rather than a complex, relational experience (Ferguson, 1994). For instance, indicators like per capita consumption or school attendance may not capture the multidimensional disadvantages faced by suburban dwellers such as landlessness, social isolation, or lack of institutional recognition.

Furthermore, evidence suggests that centralized programs are less responsive to local realities. A study by Ulfa & Mulyadi (2020) found that poor targeting, bureaucratic delays, and political favoritism undermined the effectiveness of national poverty programs in Indonesia. Without localized data and community participation, these interventions risk missing the most vulnerable.

Posthumanist critiques deepen this analysis by questioning the very framing of poverty as a human-centric issue to be "solved" by external actors. Instead, they call for co-produced solutions that recognize the agency of communities and the entanglements of humans, technologies, spaces, and ecosystems (Braidotti, 2019). This shift demands a rethinking of policy design from fixed categories to fluid, adaptive assemblages.

### ***Toward a Contextual and Participatory Policy Model***

Innovative approaches to suburban poverty must go beyond income transfers. Evidence shows that community-based and participatory models are more effective in capturing local nuances and fostering ownership (Small et al., 2008). Programs like PESIAR in Kampar represent such innovation by employing participatory mapping and community advocacy to identify and assist marginalized groups.

Moreover, asset-building strategies such as land redistribution, cooperative savings, and vocational training provide longer-term resilience. As Sachs & McCord (2008) argue, the goal should be sustainable poverty exit pathways, not mere survival. These pathways must be embedded within local institutions that reflect the lived realities of suburban communities.

Technology also plays a role. Digital tools for mapping, grievance reporting, and benefit delivery can improve transparency and responsiveness if integrated thoughtfully. However, digital inclusion must be ensured to avoid reinforcing the very exclusions that policies seek to dismantle.

Ultimately, posthumanist governance offers a promising lens. Rather than treating poor suburban communities as passive recipients, this model views them as active nodes in a network of care, obligation, and innovation. Policy, then, becomes a matter of facilitating connections

between people, systems, knowledge, and resources rather than imposing solutions from above.

## **Methodology**

### ***Research Design and Rationale***

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach to capture both the measurable and experiential dimensions of suburban poverty in Kampar Regency. The quantitative component utilized Structural Equation Modeling with Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) to examine the relationships among income levels, asset ownership, educational attainment, credit access, and participation in social networks. This method was chosen for its ability to handle complex, multivariate data and latent constructs.

The qualitative component complemented the quantitative data by offering a deeper understanding of lived experiences, policy perceptions, and socio-cultural dynamics. This included six Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), fifteen semi-structured interviews with policymakers, community leaders, and NGOs, as well as field observations in three subdistricts: Kampar, Salo, and Bangkinang. These areas were selected due to their high incidence of poverty and proximity to administrative centers.

The rationale for using a mixed-methods approach was grounded in the need to transcend numerical indicators and engage with contextual, place-based knowledge. It also aligns with the posthumanist commitment to plural epistemologies, wherein data is not merely extracted but co-produced through dialogue with affected communities.

### ***Data Collection and Sampling***

Quantitative data were collected via household surveys using structured questionnaires. A total of 777 respondents were selected using stratified random sampling based on population density, poverty status, and distance from urban centers. Variables captured included demographic structure, income sources, employment type, debt levels, and access to social protection programs.

For qualitative data, purposive sampling was employed to target informants who had direct engagement with poverty reduction programs or lived experience of poverty. FGDs were conducted with groups such as elderly citizens, female-headed households, informal workers, and community organizers. Interviews were guided by themes related to policy implementation, institutional coordination, and innovation practices.

To ensure data reliability, triangulation was applied across multiple sources: survey responses, policy documents, observational notes, and recorded narratives. All fieldwork was conducted between March and July 2023, following ethical clearance from the university's institutional review board.

### ***Analytical Framework and Limitations***

The quantitative data were analyzed using SmartPLS 4.0 software to generate path coefficients, factor loadings, and R-square values. The model tested hypotheses regarding how household characteristics and institutional variables contribute to extreme poverty. The qualitative data were coded thematically using NVivo software, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns, contradictions, and emergent categories.

A posthumanist analytical lens was applied to both data streams, focusing on how non-human

actors such as infrastructure, technologies, and policy tools mediate social outcomes. This allowed the research to move beyond individual-centric explanations and toward systemic, relational interpretations.

However, the study acknowledges certain limitations. First, the generalizability of findings is constrained by the localized nature of the study. Second, social desirability bias may have influenced qualitative responses, especially in interviews with officials. Lastly, while the SEM-PLS model captures structural relationships, it does not establish causality. These limitations are balanced by the depth and triangulation offered by the mixed-methods design.

## Results

### *Demographic and Socioeconomic Profile of Respondents*

The survey results from 777 respondents reveal that the majority of extremely poor households in suburban Kampar are headed by older individuals (average age 57), with 63.4% of them having no formal education or only primary-level schooling. Approximately 71.5% work in the informal sector as farm laborers or small-scale vendors, while only 14.3% have any form of stable income. Asset ownership is minimal, with 82.9% of households lacking productive land and 89.1% reporting no formal savings.

Access to formal credit is notably limited. Only 11.7% of respondents reported ever applying for government microcredit, while a significant 65.2% rely on informal loans from neighbors or local moneylenders. This pattern reflects both limited financial literacy and bureaucratic obstacles in accessing official assistance. Furthermore, participation in social networks or cooperatives remains low, with only 18.5% of respondents engaged in collective economic activities.

Variable	Percentage (%) or Mean
Average Household Head Age	57.2 years
No Formal/Primary Education	63.4%
Informal Sector Employment	71.5%
Lack of Productive Assets	82.9%
No Formal Savings	89.1%
Access to Formal Credit	11.7%
Reliance on Informal Loans	65.2%
Participation in Cooperatives	18.5%

Table 1. Summary of Key Demographic and Economic Indicators

### *SEM-PLS Model Results*

Using SEM-PLS analysis, the model assessed the impact of five key latent variables education, income, asset ownership, debt, and social participation on poverty status. The R-squared value of 0.081 indicates that only 8.1% of the variance in extreme poverty is explained by the model's economic and institutional predictors. Education ( $\beta = 0.27$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and asset ownership ( $\beta = 0.19$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) had statistically significant but modest effects. Debt levels and income showed weaker and non-significant relationships with poverty status.

These findings imply that structural and systemic factors beyond economic indicators likely drive the persistence of poverty. For instance, cultural attitudes toward formal employment,

bureaucratic gatekeeping in accessing aid, and infrastructural gaps are not captured in the model but were revealed in the qualitative data.

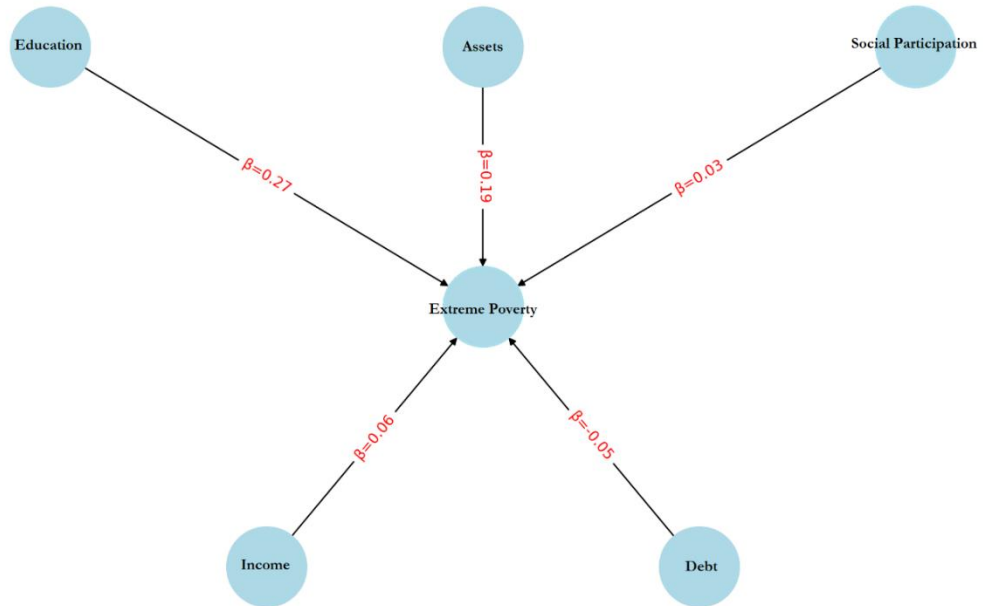


Figure 1. SEM-PLS Structural Model with Path Coefficients

### ***Insights from FGDs and Interviews***

The qualitative findings add texture to the survey results. Participants described extreme poverty as a “generational cycle” shaped by landlessness, illness, and exclusion from decision-making structures. Elderly informants lamented their children’s inability to migrate or secure formal work due to lack of documents and connections. FGDs revealed that community stigma also prevents families from seeking government aid for fear of being labeled as “lazy” or “dependent.”

Interviews with local officials highlighted fragmentation in policy implementation. One subdistrict leader noted that “poverty programs are allocated by sector, not by household needs,” resulting in duplication and missed targets. In contrast, locally initiated programs like PESIAR and PULUT KETAN were praised for their flexibility and community involvement, although they remain underfunded and lack institutional backing.

These findings reinforce the notion that poverty is relational shaped not only by income or employment but by a constellation of socio-cultural, institutional, and infrastructural factors that must be addressed holistically.

## **Discussion**

### ***Suburban Poverty as a Relational Condition***

The findings from this study underscore that extreme poverty in suburban Kampar is not simply

a matter of low income or unemployment. Instead, it reflects a broader relational condition where structural, cultural, and spatial factors intersect. The limited impact of economic variables in the SEM-PLS model ( $R^2 = 0.081$ ) suggests that conventional poverty explanations centered on material deficits fail to capture the lived complexity of suburban deprivation. This affirms the posthumanist proposition that poverty must be understood as emerging from entangled human and non-human relations (Braidotti, 2019).

### ***Institutional Fragmentation and Indicator Misalignment***

A key insight is the disconnect between policy instruments and the everyday realities of poor households. Government programs, although well-intended, operate within rigid administrative silos, leading to duplication, inefficiency, and misalignment of indicators. For example, the reliance on consumption or income benchmarks excludes non-monetary aspects such as land insecurity, health vulnerability, and social stigma. This validates earlier critiques by Ferguson (1994) on technocratic reductionism in development policy.

### ***Stigma, Social Capital, and Participation Gaps***

The qualitative data reveal that stigma and social isolation compound economic hardship. Many participants avoid seeking formal assistance due to fear of being judged, echoing Durlauf's (2006) concept of "membership effects" where group norms perpetuate cycles of exclusion. The low participation in cooperatives (18.5%) and reliance on informal lending also point to weak social capital, which is a critical but often ignored determinant of resilience in poverty studies (Narayan & Cassidy, 2001).

### ***The Promise of Local Innovation and Posthuman Governance***

Initiatives like PULUT KETAN and PESIAR demonstrate the potential of bottom-up, community-led approaches in addressing poverty more holistically. These programs utilize local knowledge, participatory mapping, and collective advocacy to fill institutional voids. From a posthumanist lens, they represent a shift away from hierarchical governance to networked assemblages of care and responsibility. The integration of both human agency and infrastructural enablement offers a more inclusive and adaptive model of policy-making.

### ***Reconceptualizing Poverty for the Suburban Age***

This study calls for a reconceptualization of poverty frameworks in light of suburbanization trends in the Global South. The binary distinction between urban and rural poverty is increasingly obsolete in settings like Kampar, where peri-urban communities embody elements of both. A more useful framework would focus on transitional geographies and their specific vulnerabilities employment precarity, land-use contestation, and policy invisibility.

In sum, addressing suburban poverty requires more than expanding social safety nets; it demands a reorientation of development paradigms. Policies must become more flexible, participatory, and spatially nuanced centered not just on economic outcomes, but on enhancing agency, connectivity, and dignity among marginalized communities.

## **Conclusion**

This study examined the multifaceted phenomenon of extreme poverty in suburban Kampar, Riau Province, Indonesia, highlighting its complexity beyond economic metrics. The findings reveal that poverty in these transitional zones is relational and systemic shaped by aging populations, low educational attainment, weak asset bases, limited access to credit, and

exclusion from participatory structures. The SEM-PLS model confirmed that traditional economic indicators only partially explain poverty, reinforcing the need for more integrated analytical frameworks.

The qualitative data illuminate critical gaps in existing anti-poverty programs, particularly their misalignment with local needs and spatial realities. While national policies remain top-down and sectoral, locally driven innovations such as PESIAR and PULUT KETAN demonstrate the efficacy of participatory and context-sensitive approaches. These initiatives provide a template for rethinking poverty governance through community empowerment, social mapping, and intersectoral collaboration.

By integrating a posthumanist perspective, this study contributes to a broader understanding of poverty as not merely a material condition but a co-produced outcome of human and non-human interactions—including policy structures, land regimes, infrastructures, and collective memory. Recognizing these entanglements opens new avenues for inclusive, adaptive, and resilient poverty alleviation strategies in suburban contexts.

## Recommendations

### 1. *Revise Poverty Indicators*

Move beyond income-based metrics by integrating spatial, cultural, and relational indicators that better reflect the lived experiences of suburban poor communities.

### 2. *Strengthen Intersectoral Coordination*

Encourage collaboration across departments (e.g., health, social affairs, agriculture) to ensure cohesive and household-centric poverty responses.

### 3. *Institutionalize Community-Based Programs*

Scale and institutionalize local innovations such as PESIAR and PULUT KETAN by embedding them into district-level poverty alleviation frameworks.

### 4. *Promote Asset Building and Credit Access*

Support programs that enhance access to productive land, cooperative savings schemes, and inclusive microfinance mechanisms tailored to suburban realities.

### 5. *Enhance Participatory Governance*

Involve affected communities in every stage of policy design, monitoring, and evaluation through structured forums, mapping initiatives, and localized planning tools.

These recommendations advocate for a paradigm shift from deficit-based, bureaucratic models to relational, adaptive, and community-empowered approaches that acknowledge the evolving nature of poverty in peri-urban and suburban spaces.

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