

## Street-Level Bureaucrats: The Dilemma Between Professionalism and Pressure in Poverty Reduction in Makassar

Anirwan<sup>1</sup>, Muhammad Akmal Ibrahim<sup>2</sup>, Hasniati<sup>2</sup>, Suryadi Lambali<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Doctoral Program in Public Administration, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Hasanuddin University, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Hasanuddin University, Indonesia

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**Abstract:** The issue of poverty is very complex involving various aspects of life; therefore, poverty alleviation requires the involvement of the government which is in direct contact with the community. In this area, of course, bureaucrats must be able to maintain professionalism to serve the community. This descriptive qualitative research aims to analyze the understanding, discretion, and professionalism of the government in poverty alleviation. Data was collected through interviews with the Office of Social Affairs, District, household, and Neighborhood Association throughout Makassar City, the poor, and poverty observer institutions. The results showed that the lack of understanding of poverty reduction policies and the lack of discretion caused the street level bureaucracy to have no flexibility. Both of these have implications for the professionalism of the street-level bureaucracy. There is no autonomy to translate their work because poverty reduction policies are top-down.

**Keywords:** Street-Level Bureaucrats; Discretion; Professionalism; Poverty

### 1. Introduction

Poverty is a social problem that requires a complex approach, both how to reduce poverty through government programs to the involvement of various components outside the government that contribute to poverty reduction efforts (Safaruddin et al, 2020). The guarantee of a decent life is a government obligation given to its citizens. Furthermore, it raises a step or attitude of the government to act in paying attention to the welfare of its people (Islamy, 2011; Fachruddin, 2015; Noor, 2014; and Firnawati, 2016; Etim & Thompson, 2020).

Government involvement in addressing the phenomenon of poverty is a strategic step by taking policies that can give birth to development programs/activities in an integrated manner between growth and equity, including efforts to increase the role of the government which is more capable of mobilizing community participation in development and changing their mindsets and mental attitudes (Putera, 2007 and Wulan, 2019).

Poverty reduction policies have a domain in common affairs related to guaranteeing the welfare of a citizen. In Indonesia, poverty reduction policies are pursued through assistance programs which are summarized in the concept of accelerating national poverty reduction (Fachruddin, 2015; Telila, 2020). Indonesia still has to face 3 (three) basic problems in an effort to lift the majority of the population who are still stuck in poverty, namely accelerating economic growth, improving social services for the poor, and protecting the poor. Handling these various problems requires appropriate poverty reduction strategies (Bhasin & Venkataramany, 2010 and Safaruddin et al, 2020).

The pattern of poverty reduction carried out by the Government of Indonesia is more in the form of cash assistance than the pattern of empowerment. This also happened in the regions, especially in Makassar. Makassar as a metropolitan city attracts the surrounding community to urbanize. The rate of urbanization is one of the causes of the high poverty rate in Makassar.

**Table 1. Number of Poor Makassar City 2020**

No	District	Poor society
1	Biringkanaya	9103
2	Bontoala	3491
3	Makassar	6702
4	Mamajang	3100
5	Manggala	6426
6	Mariso	4934
7	Panakkukang	8015

8	Rappocini	7080
9	Tallo	9926
10	Tamalanrea	3292
11	Tamalate	12152
12	Ujung Pandang	1038
13	Ujung Tanah	3596
14	Wajo	1338
<b>Total</b>		<b>82326</b>

Source: Social Service, 2020

Along with the increase in population, there is also a close relationship with the large number of poor people in the city of Makassar. Statistical data published by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) of Makassar City shows that the poverty rate has fluctuated in the last five years (2015-2019). However, the poverty rate has never decreased significantly, as shown in the data below.

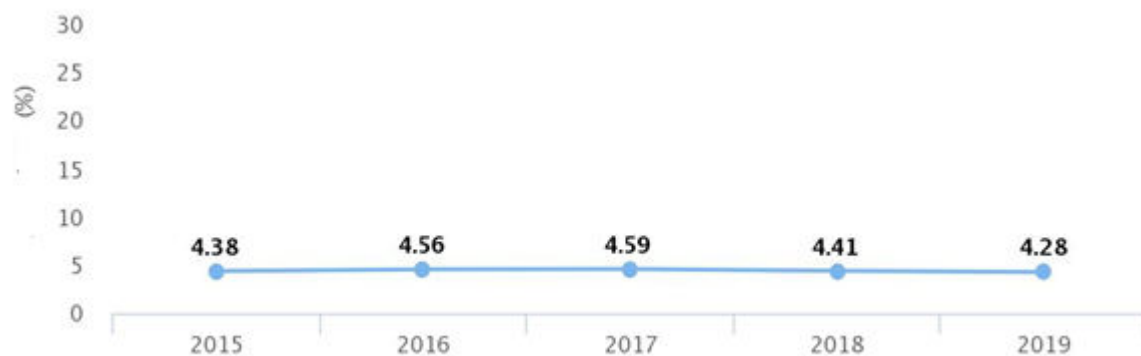


Figure 1. Development of the Percentage of Poor Population in Makassar City (2015-2019).

Source: Makassar City Central Statistics Agency, 2020

Various studies on poverty reduction from many perspectives. Poverty alleviation carried out by the government through the provision of assistance programs, for example, the Family Hope Program (PKH) assistance as researched by Nainggolan and Susantyo, Kholif, 2014; Usman, 2014; 2017; and Safaruddin et al, 2020. Or countermeasures through empowering the poor as studied by Putera, 2007; Putra, Nawawi & Rahmatullah, 2014; Noor, 2014; Ibrahim, 2017; Wulan, Ati & Widodo, 2019. Furthermore, research on poverty alleviation with a religious approach is through zakat as researched by Andriyanto, 2011; Atabik, 2016; Firmansyah, 2013; Romdhoni, 2017; Hafi & Wiguna, 2017 and Haidir, 2019.

Some of the studies above show that poverty alleviation by providing assistance is a policy that is mainstreamed by the government. This research is different from the previous one, by looking at poverty reduction efforts with the Street-Level Bureaucrats (SLBs) approach. Street-Level Bureaucrats interact directly with citizens in the provision of public services, while acting on discretionary powers and often needed to balance the demands of formal policy implementation. with the priorities of the communities they serve (Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003; Lipsky, 2010; Brodtkin, 2013).

Street-Level Bureaucrats exercise their discretionary power and what influences their attitudes, decisions, and behavior during direct delivery interactions (Evans and Harris 2004; Hupe and Hill 2007; Tummers et al. 2015; Thomann et al. 2018; Lotta and Marques 2020) . Often described as “policy makers” rather than “policy makers” (Gofen 2014), Street-Level Bureaucrats function as “the face of government to society” (Smith, 2012) and as “the intersection of states, policies and individuals” (Brodtkin, 2013), while playing a key role in structuring citizen-government relations (Brodtkin 2011) and having an “intrinsic importance to social welfare” (Lynn et al. 2001).

Exploring the Street-Level Bureaucrats approach to see poverty reduction efforts in Makassar City is an approach to how the government provides direct services to the community. The government is present in the midst of the poor to help their lives become more decent. This policy is the focus of this research.

## 2. Methods

This study is the result of a qualitative research that aims to analyze poverty reduction with the Street-Level Bureaucrats approach. The research location is in Makassar City. Data was collected through interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with informants, in this case the Office of Social Affairs, District, hamlet, and Neighborhood Association throughout Makassar City, the poor, and poverty observer institutions. Observations were made through direct object observations and existing documentation related to

poverty alleviation policies. The data analysis used is descriptive qualitative, namely describing and analyzing the data obtained to get a conclusion.

### **3. Result and Discussion**

Poverty reduction policies in Makassar are guided by Law Number 13 of 2011 concerning Handling the Poor, Presidential Regulation Number 96 of 2015 concerning Amendments to Presidential Regulation Number 15 of 2010 concerning Acceleration of Poverty Reduction, Makassar City Regional Regulation Number 11 of 2002 concerning Team Formation Makassar City Poverty Reduction Coordination that the Poverty Reduction Coordination Team is based on the Makassar Mayor Regulation Number 70 of 2015 concerning the Strategy for the Acceleration of Poverty Reduction in the Makassar City Region in 2015-2019.

Based on Makassar Mayor Regulation Number 70 of 2015 concerning Strategy for Accelerating Regional Poverty Reduction in Makassar City for 2015-2019 Chapter IV Article 5 paragraph (1) that the Makassar City regional poverty reduction strategy for 2015-2019 consists of a) main strategies; b) priority-based strategy; c) cluster program. Furthermore, paragraph 3) states that the Makassar City regional poverty reduction strategy for 2015-2019 as referred to in paragraph (1) letter (c) consists of: a) Cluster 1 (one) Program, namely: poverty reduction programs that target individuals or families or also known as Family-Based Integrated Social Assistance; b) Cluster 2 (two) Programs, namely: poverty reduction programs whose targets are communities and or communities or also called Community Empowerment-Based Poverty Reduction Programs; c) Cluster 3 (three) programs, namely: poverty alleviation programs whose targets are micro and small and medium enterprises or also called Poverty Reduction Based on Empowerment of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises; d) Cluster 4 (four) programs, namely: poverty alleviation programs by providing something at a low price for the people.

#### **Street-Level Bureaucrats Understanding**

The role of the government bureaucracy in implementing poverty reduction policies has a strategic position and determines the smoothness and sustainability of the program. The role of the government bureaucracy down to the lower levels that have direct access as the person in charge, implementer and facilitator (facilitator), must be able to stimulate the growth of development creativity and motivating in the community (Aneta, 2010). In carrying out the role of implementing policies, bureaucrats need to understand the intricacies of these policies, for example, understanding the laws and regulations.

Based on interviews with several informants, in this case the heads of the Neighborhood Association (RT) revealed that the understanding of poverty reduction policies was only limited to orders to convey information related to government programs that would provide social assistance to the poor. This is because policy socialization is only carried out at the sub-district and sub-district government levels, not at the lowest level of government. So that there is a missing link of understanding and knowledge about how to implement poverty reduction policies.

Neighborhood Association as a lower-level implementer has a very important role, namely collecting data on the poor. Upstream of poverty alleviation policies is well-verified data. The success or failure of the policy or in a more rigid language is that poverty reduction policies will succeed when the data on recipients of assistance from the poor are right on target. However, what has happened so far is that lower-level implementers are not equipped with an understanding of the indicators of who is entitled to receive the assistance.

In the end, the data on recipients of assistance from the poor face a fundamental problem. Informants from the community and several non-governmental organizations confirmed that they saw the problematic condition of data collection for aid recipients. They usually confirm directly to the Makassar City Social Service whether they are registered as beneficiaries or not. This means that from this phenomenon, the understanding of street level bureaucrats lacks knowledge about the policies being implemented.

Lipsky observed that public employees who interact with citizens sometimes behave in ways that are inappropriate, even contrary to official policy, because their job structure and understanding do not fully enable them to achieve their job expectations (Hupe and Hill, 2007). The breadth of understanding and knowledge of policies is an absolute prerequisite that must be owned by the street-level bureaucracy so that policies can run well.

#### **Street-Level Bureaucrats Discretion**

Implementing the policies of the rulers means that it is the frontline bureaucrats who carry out the policies issued by the rulers and they are also those who enforce the policies issued. Within the public policy itself, Street Level Bureaucrats are allowed to make ad hoc decisions and basic changes. This happens when the policy from above is confused in its delivery to subordinates, then these Street Level Bureaucrats are allowed to translate the policy themselves (Lipsky, 2010).

Giving discretion to the street level bureaucracy is an ideal concept in policy implementation. However, what happened in this case was that there was no discretion made by the Neighborhood Association because the poverty alleviation policy was top-down. The only role of the Neighborhood Association is to collect data on the poor who are entitled to receive assistance from the government.

This lack of discretion was summarized in interviews with the Head of the Neighborhood Association, where all of them concluded that they were not given the freedom to translate their work in implementing poverty reduction policies. Yet according to Tummers and Bekkers (2014) that street-level bureaucrats who implement public policies have a certain degree of autonomy – or discretion – in their work.

At this level, it was found that Makassar in poverty alleviation has a fundamental problem, namely the absence of discretion over the street level bureaucracy. Another problem is that street-level bureaucrats have to respond to citizens with only a limited amount of information or time to make decisions. In addition, very often the rules followed by street-level bureaucrats do not suit the particular situation of the citizens involved. In response, street bureaucrats developed coping mechanisms. They can do that because they have a certain degree of discretion – or autonomy – in their work.

### Street-Level Bureaucrats Professionalism

Street-level bureaucracies are governed by an 'occupational or professional' ideology (Lipsky, 1980). The extent to which professionals, established or self-perceived, succeed in providing such legitimacy for varied job autonomy, is determined in part by their professional history, in part related to the accessibility of their expertise. In addition, two other dimensions characterize the nature of the profession: namely, the uncertainty and invisibility of the situations in which the expertise is used (Hupe and Hill, 2007).

We have explained above that the Neighborhood Association do not know about poverty reduction policies. This ignorance has direct implications for performance in the field. They are not professional in collecting data on the poor due to lack of understanding. So that policies are taken based on instructions at a higher level of government (top-down). This phenomenon explains that the street-level bureaucracy does not have enough space to carry out work and services in accordance with the needs of the poor.

In fact, it is theoretically revealed that individual preferences or street-level bureaucratic moral reasoning are useful in explaining variations in the choices made among different types of practitioners, for example, professional versus non-professional (Sandfort, 2000 and Hasenfeld, 2012). street-level bureaucrats doing their jobs are not necessarily doing what they want, they are doing what they can do (Brodin 1997).

### 4. Conclusion

Poverty alleviation is a complicated problem faced by the Makassar City Government. Various poverty reduction programs have not been able to suppress the high number of poor people in Makassar. In this study found problems with the Street-Level Bureaucrats approach. As a policy implementer who is in direct contact with the community. The Neighborhood Association should be given an understanding of the implementation of poverty reduction policies because they are directly in contact with the community. So that poverty reduction policy programs can be right on target. In addition, the lack of discretion at the lower levels of the bureaucracy causes the lack of autonomy and flexibility to translate their work. The absence of these two aspects has direct implications for their professionalism. Therefore, our research recommends that it is important to emphasize the active role of the Neighborhood Association as a lower-level bureaucracy, not only registering the poor, but more than that, they should be given discretion and autonomy in translating poverty reduction policies.

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