

Effectiveness of child-friendly city programs on child well-being in Central Kalimantan

Eri Sriwahyuni^{1*}, Harin Tiawon², Sunaryo Neneng³

Master of Economics Program, Faculty of Economics and Business,
University of Palangka Raya^{1,2,3}

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Corresponding author.
E-mail address : erisriwahyunirsud@gmail.com
Address : Palangka Raya, Central Kalimantan
Indonesia

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Abstract. *The Child-Friendly City (CFC) program aims to improve child well-being through integrated governance and rights-based development. This study examines the effectiveness of CFC implementation in shaping child well-being outcomes in Central Kalimantan. The findings show that the program contributes to improvements in health indicators, particularly in reducing stunting and infant mortality. However, its impact on education and child protection remains inconsistent across regions. In several cases, rising reported violence reflects improved reporting systems rather than worsening conditions. Overall, the results indicate that CFC effectiveness is uneven and largely influenced by institutional capacity and policy integration. Strengthening governance and cross-sector coordination is therefore more critical than expanding program status alone.*

Keywords: *child-friendly city; child protection; child well-being; governance; policy effectiveness*

I. INTRODUCTION

Child development has increasingly been positioned as a central determinant of long-term economic performance, particularly within the human capital framework. The vision of Indonesia Emas 2045 explicitly recognizes that sustained economic growth depends not only on macroeconomic stability but also on the quality of its future workforce. In this regard, the projected demographic dividend in the period 2030–2045 represents a conditional opportunity: it can accelerate growth only if investments in children translate into improved health, education, and protection outcomes (Heckman, 2011; World Bank, 2020). Without such investments, demographic expansion may instead exacerbate inequality and social vulnerability.

From a theoretical standpoint, the analysis of child well-being has evolved from a narrow income-based perspective to a multidimensional framework rooted in the human development and capability approaches. Sen (1999) conceptualizes development as the expansion of substantive freedoms, while Nussbaum (2011) further elaborates the importance of ensuring minimum capability thresholds for a dignified life. Within this framework, child well-being

reflects not only material conditions but also the extent to which children are able to access education, maintain good health, participate socially, and live free from violence. Empirical studies reinforce this perspective, showing that multidimensional child well-being is strongly associated with long-term economic productivity and intergenerational mobility (Bradshaw & Rees, 2017; Biggeri & Ferrannini, 2019).

However, translating these theoretical principles into effective public policy remains a complex challenge. Governance-based approaches to child development emphasize the integration of policies across sectors, including education, health, social protection, and legal systems (OECD, 2019). In this context, the Child-Friendly City/Regency (CFC/KLA) program in Indonesia represents a policy innovation aimed at institutionalizing child rights within regional governance structures. Unlike traditional sectoral policies, the CFC framework adopts a holistic approach, structured around five key clusters: civil rights and freedoms, family environment, basic health and welfare, education and leisure, and special protection. This design reflects an implicit alignment with capability-based development, where policy success is expected to expand children's opportunities across multiple domains.

Despite its conceptual strength, a critical issue lies in the distinction between policy adoption and policy effectiveness. A growing body of literature suggests that governance-based programs often exhibit a gap between formal institutional achievements and substantive social outcomes (Andrews, Pritchett, & Woolcock, 2017; World Bank, 2020). In many cases, policy success is measured through administrative indicators—such as certification status or compliance with procedural standards—rather than through measurable improvements in well-being. This phenomenon, often referred to as *isomorphic mimicry*, raises concerns about whether policy expansion genuinely translates into improved outcomes or merely reflects symbolic compliance.

The implementation of the CFC program in Central Kalimantan illustrates this tension. Over the past decade, the number of districts and cities obtaining CFC status has increased, indicating a growing institutional commitment to child-friendly governance. However, this administrative progress is not necessarily accompanied by consistent improvements in child well-being indicators.

Table 1. Development of Child-Friendly City (CFC) Status in Central Kalimantan (2019–2024)

District/City	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Barito Selatan	–	–	–	–	–	–
Barito Timur	–	–	–	–	–	–
Barito Utara	–	–	–	–	–	–
Gunung Mas	–	–	–	–	–	–
Kapuas	–	–	–	Pratama	Pratama	Madya
Kotawaringin Barat	–	–	Pratama	Pratama	Madya	Pratama
Kotawaringin Timur	–	–	–	–	Pratama	Pratama
Katingan	Pratama	–	Pratama	–	Pratama	Pratama
Lamandau	Pratama	–	Pratama	–	–	–
Murung Raya	–	–	–	–	–	–
Pulang Pisau	–	–	–	Pratama	Madya	Madya
Seruyan	–	–	–	–	–	–
Sukamara	–	–	–	–	Pratama	Pratama
Palangka Raya	–	–	Pratama	Madya	Madya	Pratama

The table shows that while more regions have achieved CFC status, most remain within lower categories (*Pratama* and *Madya*), suggesting limited depth in implementation. More importantly, the expansion of CFC status does not automatically imply proportional improvements in key outcome indicators. This raises a fundamental question: to what extent does the CFC program effectively improve child well-being beyond administrative recognition?

Empirical evidence from Central Kalimantan reveals significant disparities in child well-being across regions. While some districts have achieved improvements in educational participation and reductions in infant mortality, others continue to face persistent challenges, particularly in nutrition and child protection. Stunting remains one of the most critical issues, as it reflects chronic malnutrition with long-term consequences for cognitive development and economic productivity (WHO, 2020; Prendergast & Humphrey, 2019). Although the prevalence of stunting has shown a declining trend, it remains above the WHO threshold of 20 percent, indicating that policy interventions have yet to achieve optimal effectiveness.

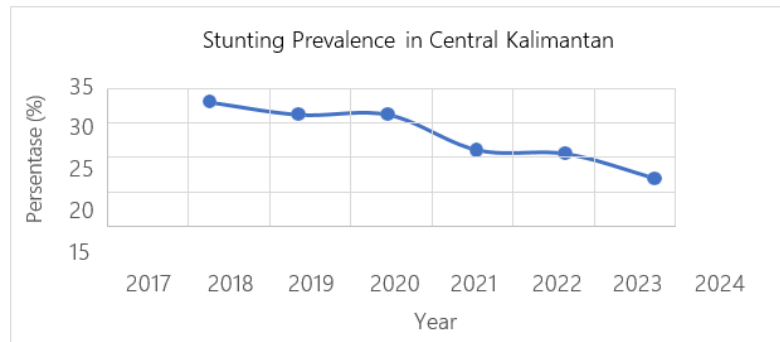


Fig 1. Stunting Prevalence in Central Kalimantan (2018–2023)

The persistence of such challenges highlights a broader issue in policy implementation: the effectiveness of child-related programs is highly dependent on institutional capacity, coordination mechanisms, and resource allocation (OECD, 2019; Andrews et al., 2017). In decentralized governance systems, regional disparities in fiscal capacity and administrative quality further complicate policy outcomes, resulting in uneven impacts across regions.

Despite the increasing importance of child-friendly policies, existing studies on the CFC program remain limited in several critical aspects. First, most evaluations focus on administrative achievements, such as the number of regions receiving CFC status, rather than examining outcome-based indicators of child well-being. Second, prior research tends to adopt a normative or descriptive approach, with limited use of systematic analytical frameworks that capture temporal changes and regional disparities. Third, there is a lack of empirical studies that explicitly address the disconnect between governance-based policy design and actual social outcomes, particularly in the context of decentralized regions.

This creates a significant gap in the literature: while the CFC program is widely promoted as a key instrument for improving child well-being, there is insufficient evidence on whether it effectively delivers measurable improvements across multiple dimensions of well-being. Moreover, the existing literature does not adequately explain why similar policies produce different outcomes across regions, indicating the need for a more context-sensitive and multidimensional evaluation approach.

This study offers several key contributions to the literature. First, it moves beyond administrative evaluation by adopting an outcome-based approach, linking CFC implementation to measurable indicators of child well-being, including education, health, child protection, and family environment. Second, it integrates *three analytical dimensions—trend analysis, cross-sectional comparison, and before–after evaluation—to capture both temporal dynamics and regional disparities.* Third, this study contributes to the broader discourse on governance effectiveness by demonstrating that the success of child-friendly policies is not solely determined by program adoption, but by the extent of institutional capacity, policy integration, and cross-sectoral coordination.

The urgency of this study is grounded in both academic and policy considerations. From an academic perspective, there is a growing need to bridge the gap between policy design and

policy outcomes, particularly in the field of child-centered development. From a policy perspective, evaluating the effectiveness of the CFC program is crucial for ensuring that investments in child development yield tangible and sustainable outcomes. This is especially relevant in the context of Indonesia Emas 2045, where the quality of human capital will play a decisive role in shaping the country's economic trajectory. Without a clear understanding of policy effectiveness, there is a risk that child-friendly initiatives may remain symbolic, failing to address underlying structural challenges. Therefore, a rigorous evaluation of the CFC program is essential not only for improving policy design but also for ensuring that development efforts translate into meaningful improvements in children's lives.

Accordingly, this study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the Child-Friendly City (CFC) program in improving child well-being in Central Kalimantan. By emphasizing outcome-based analysis and integrating multiple evaluation approaches, this study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how governance-based policies influence multidimensional child well-being.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Human Development Theory and Child Well-Being. Human development theory places individuals at the center of the development process, emphasizing that progress should be assessed not only through economic growth but also through improvements in human well-being and quality of life (UNDP, 2020; Sen, 1999). This paradigm shifts the focus from purely material indicators toward broader measures that capture health, education, and social inclusion. In this framework, development is understood as the expansion of people's capabilities and opportunities, enabling them to lead lives they value. Children occupy a particularly strategic position within this perspective because early-life conditions fundamentally shape long-term human capital formation. Consequently, investments in child development are widely recognized as essential for ensuring sustainable and inclusive economic growth (Heckman, 2011; World Bank, 2020).

Child well-being, as conceptualized within the human development framework, is inherently multidimensional and extends beyond household income or material conditions. It encompasses access to quality education, adequate healthcare, protection from violence, and supportive social and family environments (Bradshaw & Rees, 2017; Rees, 2018). These dimensions are interrelated, meaning that deprivation in one area often reinforces disadvantages in others, leading to cumulative inequality over time. Empirical research shows that children who experience multidimensional deprivation are more likely to face long-term disadvantages in education, employment, and health outcomes (Duncan & Magnuson, 2013; Black et al., 2017). Furthermore, early childhood development has been shown to yield high economic returns, particularly in improving cognitive and non-cognitive skills that are essential for productivity (Conti & Heckman, 2013). This underscores the importance of adopting integrated policy approaches that address multiple dimensions of child well-being simultaneously.

From a policy perspective, the human development approach implies that effective child-related interventions must go beyond sectoral programs and adopt a comprehensive, cross-sectoral strategy. Governments are required to ensure not only access to services but also the quality and equity of those services across regions (UNICEF, 2021; OECD, 2019). In decentralized systems such as Indonesia, disparities in regional capacity can significantly affect the distribution and effectiveness of child-focused programs. Therefore, evaluating child well-being requires a framework that captures both the breadth of policy interventions and the depth of their outcomes. This perspective is particularly relevant for assessing programs such as the Child-Friendly City (CFC/KLA), which aim to integrate child rights into regional development policies.

2.2 Development Planning Theory. Development planning is a systematic and forward-looking process designed to achieve socio-economic objectives through strategic policy formulation, resource allocation, and institutional coordination (Conyers & Hills, 1984; Todaro & Smith, 2015). Traditionally, development planning has been viewed as a technical exercise focused on setting targets and implementing programs. However, contemporary perspectives emphasize that planning is inherently a governance process that involves multiple actors, competing priorities, and complex institutional arrangements (World Bank, 2020). As such, the effectiveness of development planning depends not only on the quality of plans but also on the capacity of institutions to implement them effectively.

Different approaches to development planning have been proposed in the literature, including top-down, bottom-up, and participatory models. Top-down approaches rely on centralized decision-making and are often efficient in terms of coordination but may lack sensitivity to local needs. In contrast, bottom-up and participatory approaches emphasize community involvement and local knowledge, which can enhance policy relevance and inclusiveness (Chambers, 1997; Mansuri & Rao, 2013). Recent studies suggest that hybrid approaches, which combine centralized strategic direction with decentralized implementation, are more effective in addressing complex and multidimensional development challenges (Rodrik, 2008). These approaches allow for flexibility while maintaining coherence in policy objectives.

In the Indonesian context, development planning is institutionalized through formal frameworks such as RPJPD, RPJMD, and RKPD, which guide regional policy priorities and budget allocation. The Child-Friendly City (CFC/KLA) program represents a specific application of development planning that focuses on integrating child rights into regional governance. The program operationalizes planning principles through the establishment of measurable indicators, structured evaluation mechanisms, and cross-sectoral coordination. However, the effectiveness of such planning initiatives is often constrained by institutional limitations, including weak coordination, limited fiscal capacity, and uneven governance quality across regions (Andrews et al., 2017; World Bank, 2020). These challenges highlight the importance of evaluating not only the design of development plans but also their implementation and outcomes.

2.3 Capability Approach and the Expansion of Children's Capabilities. The capability approach, introduced by Sen (1999) and further developed by Nussbaum (2011) and Robeyns (2017), provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing well-being in terms of individuals' real opportunities to achieve valuable outcomes. Unlike traditional welfare approaches that focus on income or utility, the capability approach emphasizes the importance of freedom, agency, and access to opportunities. In this framework, well-being is determined by what individuals are able to do and be, rather than what they possess. This perspective is particularly relevant for children, whose development depends on access to enabling conditions that support their growth and participation in society.

In the context of child development, capabilities include access to education, adequate nutrition, healthcare services, and protection from harm (Biggeri & Ferrannini, 2019). These capabilities are influenced by both individual and structural factors, including family conditions, public service provision, and socio-economic inequality. Empirical studies have shown that child poverty is multidimensional, involving deprivation in several domains simultaneously rather than merely low income (Alkire & Foster, 2020; Chai et al., 2018). As a result, policies that focus solely on economic assistance may be insufficient to improve overall child well-being. Instead, integrated interventions are required to address multiple forms of deprivation and expand children's capabilities in a holistic manner.

The relevance of the capability approach to this study lies in its ability to provide a conceptual framework for evaluating policies such as the CFC program. By focusing on the expansion of children's opportunities across multiple domains, the approach allows for a more

comprehensive assessment of policy effectiveness. Regions that successfully integrate education, healthcare, and child protection services are more likely to enhance children's capabilities and achieve better outcomes. Conversely, structural inequalities and institutional constraints can limit the effectiveness of such policies, leading to uneven outcomes across regions. Therefore, the capability approach offers a valuable lens for understanding both the potential and limitations of child-focused development policies.

2.4 Effectiveness in Public Policy. Effectiveness in public policy refers to the extent to which a program or intervention achieves its intended objectives and produces measurable outcomes (Dunn, 2018). In recent years, there has been a shift toward results-based evaluation frameworks, which emphasize the importance of assessing outputs and outcomes rather than inputs or processes (OECD, 2019; Khandker et al., 2010). This shift reflects a broader recognition that policy success should be evaluated based on its actual impact on society, rather than its compliance with administrative procedures. As a result, effectiveness has become a central criterion in policy evaluation and public sector performance.

Several approaches can be used to measure policy effectiveness, including comparisons between targets and actual outcomes, before-and-after analyses, and cross-sectional comparisons across regions or groups. Each approach provides different insights into policy performance and can be used in combination to obtain a more comprehensive evaluation. In addition, recent literature emphasizes the importance of considering contextual factors, such as institutional capacity, governance quality, and socio-economic conditions, when assessing policy effectiveness (Andrews et al., 2017; World Bank, 2020). These factors can significantly influence the extent to which policies achieve their intended outcomes.

A major challenge in evaluating governance-based policies is the potential gap between formal adoption and actual implementation. Studies on institutional reform have identified the phenomenon of *isomorphic mimicry*, where governments adopt policies that resemble international best practices without achieving substantive improvements (Andrews et al., 2017). This issue is particularly relevant for programs such as the CFC, where success is often measured through administrative indicators such as certification status. Therefore, a more rigorous evaluation framework is needed to assess whether such programs produce tangible improvements in child well-being outcomes.

2.5 Dimensions of Child Well-Being. Child well-being is widely recognized as a multidimensional construct that encompasses various aspects of children's lives, including education, health, protection, and socio-economic conditions (UNICEF, 2021; OECD, 2019). These dimensions are interconnected and jointly determine the overall well-being of children. A comprehensive evaluation of child well-being must therefore consider multiple indicators that capture both material and non-material aspects of development. This multidimensional perspective is essential for understanding the complexity of child development and the factors that influence it.

The education dimension reflects children's access to and participation in formal education, which is a key determinant of human capital development. Indicators such as School Participation Rate (APS), Net Enrollment Rate (APM), and Mean Years of Schooling (RLS) are commonly used to measure educational outcomes (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2015). The health dimension, measured through indicators such as stunting prevalence and infant mortality rate, captures children's physical well-being and is closely linked to cognitive development and productivity (Black et al., 2017; WHO, 2020). The child protection dimension focuses on the safety and security of children, often measured through reported cases of violence, which reflect both actual conditions and the effectiveness of reporting systems (Fang et al., 2015).

The family environment dimension, typically proxied by poverty rates, represents the socio-economic context in which children grow and develop. Poverty is a fundamental

determinant of child well-being, influencing access to education, healthcare, and nutrition (Duncan & Magnuson, 2013; World Bank, 2020). Children living in poor households are more likely to experience multiple forms of deprivation, which can have long-term consequences for their development. By integrating these dimensions, this study adopts a comprehensive framework for evaluating child well-being and assessing the effectiveness of the CFC program.

III. METHODS

This study employs a quantitative approach using a descriptive–evaluative design to assess the effectiveness of the Child-Friendly City (CFC/KLA) program in improving child well-being in Central Kalimantan. The analysis is based on secondary data covering 14 districts/cities over the period 2019–2024, obtained from official sources including the Ministry of Women’s Empowerment and Child Protection (KemenPPPA), the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS), and other government publications. The study focuses on four key dimensions of child well-being: education (APS, APM, and Mean Years of Schooling), health (stunting prevalence and infant mortality rate), child protection (reported cases of violence against children), and family environment (poverty rate). In addition, the CFC status is categorized into hierarchical levels (e.g., non-CFC, Pratama, Madya) as the primary policy variable. This design does not aim to establish causal relationships but to evaluate policy effectiveness through observable changes in outcome indicators.

Data analysis is conducted using three complementary approaches. First, time series analysis is applied to examine trends in CFC status and child well-being indicators over time, allowing the identification of patterns of progress or stagnation. Second, cross-sectional comparison is used to assess differences across districts/cities, particularly whether regions with higher CFC categories exhibit better outcomes. Third, a before–after analysis is conducted to compare conditions before and after regions achieve CFC status, providing an approximation of policy impact. Although this approach does not establish strict causal inference, it offers a robust outcome-based evaluation consistent with results-oriented policy assessment frameworks (OECD, 2019).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Implementation of the CFC Program in Central Kalimantan. The implementation of the Child-Friendly City (CFC/KLA) program in Central Kalimantan demonstrates a gradual yet non-linear trajectory over the period 2019–2024. Initially, only a limited number of districts achieved CFC status, indicating early-stage adoption of the program. The absence of recognized regions in 2020 reflects the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected administrative processes and policy execution. However, a significant increase occurred during 2021–2023, suggesting renewed institutional commitment and recovery in governance capacity.

Despite this progress, the decline observed in 2024 indicates that the implementation of the CFC program has not yet reached a stable and sustainable level. This fluctuation highlights the vulnerability of policy implementation to external shocks and institutional limitations. From a governance perspective, the expansion of CFC status should not be interpreted solely as policy success, but rather as an indication of administrative compliance. Therefore, a deeper evaluation is required to determine whether the program produces tangible improvements in child well-being outcomes.

4.2 Development of Education Indicators. Education indicators provide important insights into the effectiveness of the CFC program, particularly in terms of access, participation, and continuity of schooling. While access to education in Central Kalimantan is already relatively

high, variations in participation quality and educational attainment remain critical issues. Therefore, analyzing APS, APM, and RLS collectively allows for a more comprehensive understanding of educational outcomes. These indicators reflect both short-term participation dynamics and long-term structural improvements in human capital development.

Before presenting the results, it is important to highlight that the Net Enrollment Rate (APM) reflects the appropriateness of school participation, measuring whether children attend school according to their age group. This indicator is more sensitive than general participation measures because it captures issues such as delayed enrollment and grade repetition. Consequently, APM is a more reliable indicator for assessing the quality of educational participation. Changes in APM can therefore provide a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of policy interventions such as the CFC program.

Table 2. Changes in Net Enrollment Rate (APM) in CFC Regions

District	Initial Year	Initial APM	Latest APM	Change	Interpretation
Kapuas	2022	91.43	90.10	-1.33	Decline
Kotawaringin Barat	2021	96.39	95.80	-0.59	Slight decline
Kotawaringin Timur	2023	94.70	94.50	-0.20	Stable
Katingan	2019	89.28	89.50	+0.22	Slight improvement
Lamandau	2019	97.92	91.80	-6.12	Significant decline
Pulang Pisau	2022	91.32	92.30	+0.98	Improvement
Sukamara	2023	90.80	91.20	+0.40	Improvement
Palangka Raya	2021	95.64	97.10	+1.46	Improvement

Source: Processed data (2026)

The results indicate that APM exhibits a heterogeneous pattern across districts, with both improvements and declines observed. While several regions show positive trends, others experience stagnation or decline, indicating that improvements in educational participation are not uniformly distributed. This variation suggests that the effectiveness of the CFC program in influencing education outcomes is limited and context-dependent, rather than systematic across regions.

Furthermore, the presence of significant declines in certain districts, such as Lamandau, indicates that structural challenges—such as economic constraints, access disparities, and post-pandemic recovery—may outweigh the influence of policy interventions. This finding aligns with the argument that education outcomes are shaped by long-term socio-economic conditions rather than short-term policy initiatives. Therefore, the CFC program appears to have a limited direct impact on improving educational participation quality, particularly when underlying structural issues remain unresolved.

The Mean Years of Schooling (RLS) is a key indicator that reflects the accumulated educational attainment of the population. Unlike participation indicators, RLS captures long-term educational outcomes and is less sensitive to short-term fluctuations. This makes it a more reliable measure of structural improvements in human capital. Therefore, analyzing changes in RLS provides insight into whether policy interventions contribute to sustained educational progress.

Table 3. Changes in Mean Years of Schooling (RLS) in CFC Regions

District	Initial Year	Initial RLS	Latest RLS	Change	Interpretation
Kapuas	2022	7.64	7.84	+0.20	Increasing
Kotawaringin Barat	2021	8.53	8.66	+0.13	Increasing
Kotawaringin Timur	2023	8.16	8.17	+0.01	Stable
Katingan	2019	8.66	8.85	+0.19	Increasing
Lamandau	2019	8.38	8.67	+0.29	Increasing

Pulang Pisau	2022	8.26	8.27	+0.01	Stable
Sukamara	2023	8.10	8.17	+0.07	Increasing
Palangka Raya	2021	11.53	11.65	+0.12	Increasing

Source: Processed data (2026)

The results show that RLS demonstrates a consistent upward trend across most districts, indicating gradual improvements in educational attainment. Although the magnitude of change is relatively small, the direction of change is consistently positive, suggesting sustained progress in educational continuity. This pattern reflects the cumulative nature of education, where improvements occur incrementally over time rather than abruptly.

However, the gradual nature of these improvements indicates that changes in RLS are more likely driven by long-term structural factors, such as improved access to education, demographic changes, and broader development policies. As such, the direct contribution of the CFC program to these improvements appears limited. Instead, the program may play a supportive role in maintaining progress, rather than acting as a primary driver of change. This finding highlights the importance of distinguishing between policy contribution and broader structural trends in evaluating program effectiveness.

4.3 Development of Health Indicators. Health indicators are essential in assessing child well-being, particularly in terms of nutrition and survival outcomes. Compared to education indicators, health indicators tend to reflect more direct outcomes of public service delivery, especially in maternal and child health programs. In this study, health conditions are represented by stunting prevalence and infant mortality rate (IMR). These indicators provide a comprehensive picture of children's physical development and access to healthcare services across regions.

Before presenting the data, it is important to note that stunting reflects chronic malnutrition and has long-term consequences for cognitive development and productivity. Therefore, reductions in stunting prevalence indicate improvements in child nutrition and overall health conditions. This indicator is widely used to evaluate the effectiveness of integrated health and nutrition interventions. Changes in stunting prevalence can thus reflect both program performance and broader socio-economic conditions.

Table 4. Changes in Stunting Prevalence in CFC Regions

District	Initial Year	Initial (%)	Latest (%)	Change	Interpretation
Kapuas	2022	21.1	22.5	+1.4	Increased
Kotawaringin Barat	2021	23.4	16.5	-6.9	Significant decline
Kotawaringin Timur	2023	25.9	21.6	-4.3	Decline
Katingan	2019	31.94	26.0	-5.94	Decline
Lamandau	2019	26.96	18.3	-8.66	Significant decline
Pulang Pisau	2022	31.6	27.0	-4.6	Decline
Sukamara	2023	20.4	20.0	-0.4	Stable
Palangka Raya	2021	25.2	22.5	-2.7	Decline

Source: Processed data (2026)

The table shows that the majority of districts experienced a decline in stunting prevalence, indicating improvements in child nutrition. Significant reductions are observed in Kotawaringin Barat and Lamandau, suggesting stronger performance in health-related interventions in these regions. However, not all districts follow this pattern, as Kapuas shows an increase, indicating that improvements are not uniformly distributed. This variation suggests that local conditions continue to play a role in shaping health outcomes. Overall, the direction of change is predominantly positive, with most districts experiencing reductions in stunting. The relatively

consistent downward trend across regions suggests improvements in access to nutrition and health services. However, the presence of outliers indicates that progress is still uneven and influenced by region-specific factors.

The infant mortality rate (IMR) is a critical indicator of healthcare quality, particularly in maternal and neonatal services. It reflects not only access to healthcare facilities but also the effectiveness of preventive and curative interventions. A decline in IMR generally indicates improvements in healthcare systems, including better prenatal care, delivery services, and postnatal support. Therefore, this indicator is widely used to evaluate progress in child health outcomes.

Table 5. Changes in Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) in CFC Regions

No	District	Initial Year	Initial IMR	Latest IMR	Change	Interpretation
1	Lamandau	2019	18.6	17.3	-1.3	Decline
2	Katingan	2019	15.8	14.8	-1.0	Decline
3	Kotawaringin Barat	2021	18.4	17.8	-0.6	Decline
4	Palangka Raya	2021	14.1	13.7	-0.4	Decline
5	Kapuas	2022	19.6	19.2	-0.4	Decline
6	Pulang Pisau	2022	18.8	18.4	-0.4	Decline
7	Sukamara	2023	14.5	14.3	-0.2	Stable
8	Kotawaringin Timur	2023	14.4	14.2	-0.2	Stable

Source: Processed data (2026)

The IMR indicator shows a consistent downward trend across all districts, with no region experiencing an increase. Although the magnitude of decline varies, the direction of change is uniformly positive. This consistency suggests improvements in maternal and child healthcare services across the province. In addition, the relatively stable pattern in some regions indicates that improvements may be gradual but sustained. Compared to other indicators, IMR demonstrates the most consistent improvement, reflecting stronger performance in healthcare delivery systems. The absence of negative trends suggests that health interventions are functioning more uniformly across regions.

4.4 Development of Child Protection Indicators. Child protection indicators are assessed through the number of reported cases of violence against children. This indicator requires careful interpretation, as increases in reported cases do not necessarily reflect worsening conditions. Instead, they may indicate improvements in reporting systems, public awareness, and institutional responsiveness. Therefore, trends in this indicator must be understood within the broader context of policy implementation and system development.

Before presenting the data, it is important to emphasize that reported cases are influenced by both actual incidence and reporting capacity. Improvements in data systems, awareness, and access to services often lead to increased reporting. Therefore, rising numbers may reflect better detection rather than increased occurrence. This distinction is crucial in interpreting child protection indicators.

Table 6. Changes in Reported Cases of Violence Against Children in CFC Regions

District	Initial Year	Initial Cases	Latest Cases	Change	Interpretation
Kapuas	2022	34	33	-1	Stable
Kotawaringin Barat	2021	1	39	+38	Sharp increase
Kotawaringin Timur	2023	30	43	+13	Increase
Katingan	2019	9	27	+18	Increase
Lamandau	2019	8	10	+2	Stable
Pulang Pisau	2022	27	8	-19	Decline

Sukamara	2023	11	12	+1	Stable
Palangka Raya	2021	31	49	+18	Increase

Source: Processed data (2026)

The data show that several districts experience increases in reported cases, particularly Kotawaringin Barat, Katingan, and Palangka Raya. However, these increases should not be directly interpreted as worsening conditions. Instead, they may reflect improvements in reporting mechanisms and increased public awareness. At the same time, some regions, such as Pulang Pisau, show a decline in reported cases, which may indicate improvements in actual protection conditions. Other regions remain relatively stable, suggesting minimal change. Overall, the pattern is mixed and requires cautious interpretation, as changes may reflect both actual conditions and improvements in reporting systems.

4.5 Development of Family Environment Indicators (Poverty). The family environment is represented by poverty rates, which play a critical role in shaping child well-being. Poverty affects access to education, healthcare, and nutrition, making it a key structural determinant. Changes in poverty levels are influenced by broader economic conditions, including macroeconomic trends and external shocks. Therefore, this indicator provides context for understanding variations in child well-being outcomes.

Before presenting the data, it is important to note that poverty trends during the study period are influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused economic contraction in 2020–2021. The subsequent recovery phase in 2022–2023 reflects gradual economic stabilization. Therefore, changes in poverty rates must be interpreted within this broader economic context.

Table 7. Changes in Poverty Rate in CFC Regions

District	Initial Year	Initial (%)	Latest (%)	Change	Interpretation
Kapuas	2022	6.5	5.48	-1.02	Decline
Kotawaringin Barat	2021	5.2	4.27	-0.93	Decline
Kotawaringin Timur	2023	6.7	5.83	-0.87	Decline
Katingan	2019	5.3	5.5	+0.2	Stable
Lamandau	2019	6.8	7.0	+0.2	Stable
Pulang Pisau	2022	6.0	5.8	-0.2	Stable
Sukamara	2023	7.5	7.2	-0.3	Slight decline
Palangka Raya	2021	4.5	4.1	-0.4	Decline

Source: Processed data (2026)

The results indicate that most districts experience a decline in poverty rates, although the magnitude of change is relatively modest. This suggests gradual improvement in economic conditions, particularly during the post-pandemic recovery period. However, some districts show stable or slightly increasing poverty levels, indicating uneven economic recovery. Overall, changes in poverty appear to be moderate and not strongly linked to CFC implementation, as they are influenced by broader economic factors. The pattern suggests that improvements in family economic conditions are shaped more by macroeconomic trends than by child-focused policy interventions.

4.6 Summary of CFC Effectiveness Across Indicators. To synthesize the findings, a comparison across all indicators is conducted using a before–after approach. This summary provides an overview of the direction of change across key dimensions of child well-being.

Table 8. Summary of CFC Effectiveness by Indicator

Indicator	Direction of Change	General Pattern
RLS	Increase	Consistent but gradual
APS	Stable (high)	Minimal change
APM	Mixed	Varies across regions
Stunting	Decrease	Relatively consistent
Violence Cases	Increase (reported)	Reflects improved reporting
Poverty	Stable / slight decrease	Influenced by external factors

Source: Processed data (2026)

The summary shows that changes across indicators vary in both direction and consistency. Education indicators tend to be stable or gradually improving, while health indicators show more consistent positive trends. Child protection indicators exhibit mixed patterns due to reporting dynamics, and poverty shows moderate changes influenced by broader economic conditions. Overall, the results indicate that improvements are more evident in service-related indicators, while structural indicators show slower or more limited change.

4.7 Cross-Sectional Disparity Analysis. The cross-sectional comparison across districts reveals significant regional disparities in child well-being outcomes, despite the expansion of the CFC program. Urban areas such as Palangka Raya and Kotawaringin Barat consistently outperform other districts in education and health indicators, while more remote regions, including Murung Raya and several inland districts, continue to face structural challenges, particularly in poverty and education. This spatial inequality reflects uneven access to public services, infrastructure, and institutional capacity, which are widely recognized as key determinants of development outcomes (World Bank, 2020; Rodriguez-Pose, 2013). The persistence of such disparities suggests that policy implementation outcomes are strongly mediated by local context rather than uniformly determined by program adoption.

Interestingly, districts with higher CFC status (e.g., *Madya*) do not consistently demonstrate superior performance across all quantitative indicators. This finding indicates that CFC certification does not directly correspond to the highest levels of measurable child well-being. Instead, it supports the argument that CFC is primarily a governance-based policy instrument, emphasizing institutional readiness, regulatory compliance, and cross-sectoral coordination (UNICEF, 2018; OECD, 2019). In this sense, CFC status reflects the capacity to implement child-focused policies, rather than the immediate realization of optimal outcomes. This aligns with the concept of *institutional isomorphism*, where policy adoption may precede substantive outcomes (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Andrews et al., 2017).

From a theoretical perspective, these findings reinforce the capability approach, which emphasizes that well-being outcomes are shaped by access to enabling conditions rather than policy labels alone (Sen, 1999; Robeyns, 2017). Regions with stronger institutional capacity are better able to convert policy frameworks into real opportunities for children, while weaker regions struggle despite formal policy adoption. Therefore, the observed disparities highlight the importance of addressing structural inequalities and institutional gaps to ensure that governance-based policies such as CFC translate into equitable outcomes across regions.

4.8 Evaluation of CFC Policy Effectiveness. The overall evaluation indicates that the effectiveness of the CFC program is multidimensional and uneven across indicators. The program demonstrates relatively strong performance in improving basic service delivery systems, particularly in education continuity (RLS), health outcomes (stunting reduction and IMR decline), and the strengthening of child protection reporting systems. These findings suggest that CFC has contributed to enhancing institutional coordination and service provision, which are critical components of child-friendly governance (UNICEF, 2021; OECD, 2019). The

observed improvements are consistent with previous studies highlighting that integrated governance approaches can strengthen service delivery outcomes (Mansuri & Rao, 2013; Andrews et al., 2017).

However, the impact of CFC on structural economic indicators, particularly poverty, remains limited. Changes in poverty levels are relatively modest and appear to be driven more by macroeconomic conditions than by child-focused policies. This finding aligns with the broader literature on development policy, which suggests that social sector interventions often have indirect and long-term effects on economic outcomes (Todaro & Smith, 2015; Ravallion, 2012). In this context, the CFC program functions more effectively as a social governance framework rather than an economic policy instrument. Therefore, expecting immediate reductions in poverty as a direct outcome of CFC implementation may not be realistic.

Moreover, the increase in reported cases of child violence should be interpreted as a positive institutional signal, reflecting improved reporting systems, greater public awareness, and enhanced access to protection services. This interpretation is supported by studies showing that improved governance and reporting mechanisms often lead to an initial increase in reported cases (Fang et al., 2015; UNICEF, 2018). Thus, rather than indicating worsening conditions, this trend suggests progress in the visibility and responsiveness of child protection systems. Taken together, these findings confirm that the CFC program is most effective in strengthening governance structures, service delivery systems, and institutional coordination, while its impact on broader socio-economic conditions remains indirect and gradual. This supports the view that CFC is fundamentally a governance-driven, integrative policy, where success is better reflected in system improvements rather than immediate macro-level outcomes.

4.9 Theoretical Implications. From a theoretical standpoint, this study reinforces the relevance of a multidimensional governance approach in understanding child-focused public policies. The findings demonstrate that the effectiveness of the CFC program cannot be adequately explained through a single-sector framework but must be analyzed as an integrated policy system encompassing education, health, protection, and socio-economic dimensions. This supports the human development and capability perspectives, which emphasize the interconnected nature of well-being indicators (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011; UNDP, 2020).

Furthermore, this study contributes to the literature on policy implementation and institutional capacity by highlighting that policy success is not solely determined by formal adoption but by the ability of institutions to operationalize policies effectively. The divergence between CFC status and actual outcomes reflects the importance of implementation capacity, coordination, and governance quality (Andrews et al., 2017; World Bank, 2020). This finding extends previous research by demonstrating that governance-based policies may produce asymmetric outcomes across dimensions, depending on the nature of the indicators and the strength of institutional systems.

In addition, this study enriches the methodological discourse by applying a combined approach of before–after analysis and cross-sectional synthesis in evaluating regional policy effectiveness. The results show that the relationship between policy status and social outcomes is contextual, non-linear, and multidimensional, challenging simplistic assumptions of direct causality. This contributes to the growing body of literature that emphasizes the complexity of policy evaluation in decentralized and heterogeneous contexts (Rodrik, 2008; OECD, 2019).

4.10 Practical Implications. From a practical perspective, the findings provide several important policy implications for local governments and stakeholders. First, the relatively positive trends in education and health indicators suggest that cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms within the CFC framework should be strengthened and sustained. Effective collaboration between education, health, and social protection sectors is essential for maintaining and enhancing

child well-being outcomes. This is consistent with prior studies emphasizing the importance of integrated governance in child-friendly policies (Suciati, 2018; Pabia et al., 2022).

Second, in the area of child protection, the increase in reported cases highlights the need to further strengthen institutional capacity for response and prevention, including the role of technical units such as UPT PPA, reporting systems, and public awareness campaigns. Rather than focusing solely on reducing reported cases, policymakers should prioritize improving the quality of protection systems, ensuring accessibility, responsiveness, and victim support. This aligns with the broader understanding that child protection requires both preventive and responsive mechanisms (UNICEF, 2021; Fang et al., 2015).

Third, the limited impact of CFC on poverty reduction indicates the need for stronger policy integration between child-focused programs and broader socio-economic interventions. Local governments should align CFC initiatives with poverty alleviation programs, social assistance schemes, and family-based welfare policies. This integration is crucial for addressing the structural determinants of child well-being, particularly in economically vulnerable regions.

Finally, this study underscores the importance of developing integrated monitoring and evaluation systems that go beyond administrative indicators. Current evaluations of CFC often emphasize certification status, which may not fully capture substantive outcomes. Therefore, policymakers should adopt data-driven evaluation frameworks that measure both institutional performance and real impacts on child well-being. This approach responds to critiques in previous studies that highlight the tendency of policy evaluations to remain normative and administrative rather than outcome-oriented (Widiyanto & Rijanta, 2012).

V. CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Child-Friendly City (CFC/KLA) program in Central Kalimantan exhibits a fluctuating and yet-to-stabilize trajectory. Although the number of districts achieving CFC status increased and peaked in 2023, the decline observed in 2024 indicates challenges in policy sustainability and institutional consistency. Across dimensions, child well-being outcomes remain uneven. In education, APS remains largely stagnant, APM fluctuates, and RLS increases gradually, suggesting that the program has not yet produced significant improvements in the quality of educational participation. In contrast, the health dimension shows relatively stronger performance, reflected in declining stunting prevalence and infant mortality rates. In child protection, the rise in reported cases appears to reflect improved reporting systems and public awareness rather than a deterioration of conditions, while in the economic dimension, poverty reduction remains limited, indicating a weak direct impact of the program.

Overall, the CFC program demonstrates a positive contribution to strengthening child service systems and governance frameworks, particularly in education and health sectors. However, its effectiveness is contextual and multidimensional, with impacts on economic well-being remaining indirect and long-term. These findings confirm that CFC is fundamentally a governance-based integrative policy, where success is more evident in institutional strengthening and child-friendly public service delivery than in short-term macroeconomic outcomes. Given these limitations, future research should adopt more robust causal approaches, such as panel data regression or difference-in-differences, to better identify policy impacts. Additionally, incorporating broader variables—such as child protection budgets, regional fiscal capacity, human development indices, and child participation—alongside primary data collection and spatial analysis, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of disparities and policy effectiveness across regions.

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