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Collaborative Governance in Handling Neglected Children in Sukabumi City, 2022-2024

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the collaborative governance process in handling neglected children in Sukabumi City from 2022 to 2024. The number of neglected children recorded during this period shows a concerning trend, with an average of only about 22% successfully handled. Using a descriptive qualitative method based on Ansell and Gash's (2007) collaborative governance model which consists of four dimensions: starting conditions, institutional design, facilitative leadership, and collaborative process data were collected through in-depth interviews with five key informant groups: the Department of Social Affairs (Dinas Sosial), Satpol PP (Civil Service Police Unit), DP2KBP3A, LKSA Ummi Kulsum, and IPSM (Community Social Workers Association). The findings indicate that the collaborative governance process has not functioned effectively. The four dimensions mutually reinforce weaknesses in a recurring cycle: unequal starting conditions, suboptimal facilitative leadership, inadequate institutional design, and a reactive collaborative process. The main constraints include the absence of an official decree establishing an interagency integrated team, the lack of a regular coordination forum, differing incentives among stakeholders, and a complaint-based service system. This study recommends the immediate issuance of an official decree establishing an interagency integrated team and the formation of a regular coordination forum to strengthen multi-stakeholder collaboration.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menganalisis proses *collaborative governance* dalam penanganan anak terlantar di Kota Sukabumi tahun 2022 hingga 2024. Jumlah anak terlantar yang tercatat selama periode tersebut menunjukkan tren yang mengkhawatirkan, dengan rata-rata hanya sekitar 22% yang berhasil ditangani. Menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif dengan model *collaborative governance* Ansell dan Gash (2007) yang terdiri dari empat dimensi: kondisi awal (*starting conditions*), desain kelembagaan (*institutional design*), kepemimpinan fasilitatif (*facilitative leadership*), dan proses kolaboratif (*collaborative process*) data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan lima kelompok informan kunci: Dinas Sosial, Satpol PP, DP2KBP3A, LKSA Ummi Kulsum, dan IPSM. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa proses *collaborative governance* belum berjalan secara efektif. Keempat dimensi saling memperlemah dalam siklus yang berulang: kondisi awal yang timpang, kepemimpinan fasilitatif yang belum optimal, desain kelembagaan yang tidak memadai, dan proses kolaboratif yang bersifat reaktif. Faktor penghambat utama mencakup belum adanya SK Tim Terpadu lintas instansi, ketiadaan forum koordinasi rutin, perbedaan insentif antar-stakeholder, dan sistem layanan berbasis aduan. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan segera diterbitkannya SK Tim Terpadu lintas instansi dan pembentukan forum koordinasi rutin guna memperkuat kolaborasi multi-stakeholder.



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INTRODUCTION

Children are the next generation of the nation whose existence is protected by the constitution. Article 34 paragraph (1) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia stipulates that the poor and neglected children shall be cared for by the state. This obligation is reinforced by Law Number 35 of 2014 on Child Protection, which requires the state, regional governments, communities, families, and parents to provide protection to every child. Neglected children are defined as children whose needs are not adequately met, whether physical, mental, spiritual, or social (Law No. 35 of 2014). Despite the availability of child protection regulations, the problem of neglected children in Indonesia remains a serious social issue that has not been resolved optimally.

In Sukabumi City, the phenomenon of neglected children showed a worrying trend during the 2022–2024 period. Data from the Sukabumi City Department of Social Affairs (Dinas Sosial) recorded 322 neglected children in 2022, 264 in 2023, and an increase back to 276 in 2024. More alarmingly, handling capacity was far inadequate: only 90 children (27.9%) were handled in 2022, 45 children (17.0%) in 2023, and 63 children (22.8%) in 2024, meaning only approximately 22% of recorded neglected children were successfully handled on average. This gap indicates that existing handling capacity does not match the scale of the problem. This situation was further compounded by the continuing presence of street children in public spaces: in 2024, the Civil Service Police Unit (Satpol PP) reached 54 street children, yet only 4 received follow-up action (Wartain.com, 2025).

The problem of neglected children is a wicked problem (Rittel & Webber, 1973) a complex, multidimensional issue involving multiple actors with divergent interests. Its handling touches on economic, health, educational, child protection, and regional regulation enforcement aspects, making it impossible for any single institution to address independently. The Dinas Sosial as the leading sector faces limitations in budget, human resources, and infrastructure, necessitating collaboration with various stakeholders including fellow Regional Government Organizations (OPD) such as Satpol PP, DP2KBP3A, the Health Department, and the Education Department as well as non-governmental actors such as Child Social Welfare Institutions (LKSA) and Community Social Workers (IPSM).

The Sukabumi City Dinas Sosial Strategic Plan 2024–2026 explicitly acknowledges that “the lack of maximum alignment between the Department and related stakeholders in resolving social welfare recipients (PPKS)” constitutes a key unresolved problem. This indicates that the issue does not lie in the absence of regulations but in how the collaborative process operates. To analyze this phenomenon, the collaborative governance approach becomes highly relevant.

Collaborative governance, as defined by Ansell and Gash (2007), is a governing arrangement in which one or more public institutions directly engage non-governmental actors in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative, with the aim of making or implementing public policy. This approach differs from ordinary administrative coordination in that it demands active and equal participation from all actors in shared decision-making (Robertson & Choi, 2011). Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh (2011) extend this definition by emphasizing that collaborative governance encompasses processes and structures in public policy decision management involving multiple levels of government, private institutions, and civil society in pursuit of public goals unachievable by a single party alone.

Previous studies on neglected child handling in Sukabumi City by Meigawati (2019), Latifah (2021), and Nur et al. (2024) employed policy implementation, organizational performance, and effectiveness frameworks, leaving the multi-actor collaboration process perspective unexplored. Meanwhile, collaborative governance studies by Angga (2024) and Nisa et al. (2023) addressed homelessness and people with mental disorders, not neglected children. This research gap motivates the present study, which aims to analyze the process of collaborative governance in handling neglected children in Sukabumi City in 2022–2024, using the Ansell and Gash (2007) model with its four dimensions: starting conditions, facilitative leadership, institutional design, and collaborative process

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. This approach was selected because the research objective is to describe in depth the collaborative governance process occurring in neglected child handling in Sukabumi City, rather than testing hypotheses or measuring variable relationships. As argued by Creswell (2023), qualitative research is a method for exploring and understanding the meaning people ascribe to a problem. The study was conducted in Sukabumi City, West Java Province, covering the 2022–2024 period.

The primary analytical framework was the Ansell and Gash (2007) collaborative governance model, comprising four dimensions: (1) starting conditions, encompassing power imbalances, participation incentives, and prior conflict or cooperation experiences among stakeholders; (2) facilitative leadership, emphasizing the leader's role in building trust and facilitating dialogue; (3) institutional design, referring to participation inclusivity, forum exclusivity, and process transparency; and (4) collaborative process, covering face-to-face dialogue and small wins.

Research subjects were determined using purposive sampling based on direct involvement in neglected child handling in Sukabumi City. Informants comprised five groups: (1) Sukabumi City Dinas Sosial as the leading sector; (2) Sukabumi City Civil Service Police Unit (Satpol PP) as the executor of street child outreach; (3) the Population Control, Family Planning, Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Agency (DP2KBP3A); (4) LKSA Ummi Kulsum as a representative non-governmental actor in child care; and (5) the Community Social Workers (IPSM) of Sukabumi City as the link between the community and the government.

Data were collected through three techniques: (1) direct observation of neglected child handling activities; (2) semi-structured in-depth interviews with all five informant groups guided by an interview protocol aligned with the four dimensions of the Ansell and Gash (2007) model; and (3) documentary review of policy documents, statistical data, and activity reports. Data validity was tested using source triangulation and technique triangulation (Sugiyono, 2023). Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman (2014) interactive model through three stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing.

RESULTS

This section presents the empirical findings of the collaborative governance process in handling neglected children in Sukabumi City during 2022–2024, organized around the four dimensions of the Ansell and Gash (2007) model. Beyond documenting that each weakness exists, the analysis below traces the underlying mechanism that produces each weakness that

is, why the observed pattern of coordination generates the outcome it does so that the recommendations in the Discussion section address root causes rather than surface symptoms.

Starting Conditions

The starting conditions dimension revealed two principal characteristics shaping the collaborative process. First, a dual power imbalance: Dinas Sosial holds formal authority dominance as the leading sector under Sukabumi City Regional Regulation No. 06 of 2016 on Social Welfare Implementation, yet is operationally highly dependent on LKSA which possesses long-term child care capacity. The most evident indicator of this condition is the absence of a formal cross-agency Integrated Team Decree (SK Tim Terpadu) specifically for children. Informant 1 (Dinas Sosial) stated that “a cross-agency team decree specifically for children does not yet exist, but internally the Social Department already has an Integrated Team Consideration Decree for handling neglected children and adoption.”

This asymmetry appears to be more than incidental, and closely tied to the structure of authority itself: Regional Regulation No. 06 of 2016 assigns Dinas Sosial coordinative authority over rehabilitation without allocating a corresponding long-term care capacity, a function the regulation implicitly leaves to LKSA. Because authority and operational capacity have not been fully bundled within a single actor, dependency on LKSA can be understood as a consequence of how roles were originally divided, rather than merely a temporary resource shortfall that could be resolved by budget alone.

Second, stakeholder participation incentives remain misaligned. Dinas Sosial is driven by Minimum Service Standards (SPM) targets based on complaints; Satpol PP by regional regulation enforcement mandates; DP2KBP3A by institutional obligations in child protection; while LKSA and IPSM are motivated by role legitimacy and community trust. This incentive gap has not been bridged by any formal mechanism, resulting in a significant disconnect between outreach and follow-up: from 54 street children reached by Satpol PP in 2024, only 4 received follow-up action.

This disconnect is explained by the fact that the two agencies are evaluated against different metrics: Satpol PP's performance is measured by the volume of outreach and enforcement activity, while Dinas Sosial's SPM target is measured by the resolution of cases that have formally entered its complaint-based system. Because no shared outcome indicator links outreach to case resolution, each agency can fully satisfy its own performance metric even as the child in question remains unserved the 54-to-4 gap can therefore be understood as one likely consequence of how the two incentive systems are designed, rather than simply a lapse in individual effort.

Third, a history of fragmented cooperation has created a path dependency where each agency tends to operate in its own silo. Regular coordination forums last took place in 2024 and did not continue in 2025.

This path dependency persists because the 2024 forum operated on the discretion of city leadership rather than on a standing legal mandate; once leadership attention shifted elsewhere, the forum lapsed since no regulation obliged its continuation. This illustrates that informal, leadership-dependent coordination tends to be vulnerable to changes in political attention or administrative priorities, since its continuity is not underpinned by a binding legal mandate.

Facilitative Leadership

The facilitative leadership dimension reveals that Dinas Sosial has not fully performed the genuinely facilitative leadership role envisioned by Ansell and Gash (2007). Inter-agency trust has been established but remains fragile, resting on three unstable foundations: budget availability, the regional head's policy direction, and the consistency of informal communication. Dinas Sosial builds trust through rapid cross-sector responses; Satpol PP through SOPs and hierarchical reporting to the Mayor; LKSA Ummi Kulsum through a triennial operational license and periodic evaluation system; and IPSM through institutional legitimacy based on assignment letters from the sub-district government. Informant 4 (LKSA) stated: "trust is time-limited. We are granted operational permits for three years, and if there are problems, the permit can be revoked by the Social Department."

This fragility can be understood as a consequence of the informal basis on which the leadership role rests: because no regulation formally designates Dinas Sosial as the convener of an interagency forum, its facilitative function is more self-assumed than formally mandated. This suggests that its continuity depends on the discretionary availability of budget and leadership attention, rather than on an institutional obligation that would persist regardless of who occupies the leadership role.

The facilitation of dialogue and negotiation only occurs reactively, not as a planned and sustainable process. The absence of regular coordination forums since 2025 means that differences in understanding of functional boundaries such as Dinas Sosial's scope limited to the poor registered in the National Integrated Social Data (DTSN) versus DP2KBP3A's broader mandate irrespective of economic status are never fully resolved through a formal forum. Coordination is largely conducted via instant messaging (WhatsApp) and telephone calls, alternating between formal and informal channels depending on the situation.

Because dialogue is triggered only by the emergence of a specific case rather than by a standing schedule, no case-independent learning accumulates between episodes of coordination. Each functional-boundary dispute is therefore renegotiated from scratch every time it recurs, rather than being resolved once through an agreed protocol that subsequent cases could simply follow.

Institutional Design

Institutional design refers to the agreed-upon ground rules for how collaboration is conducted, including inclusivity of participation, exclusivity of the forum, and process transparency (Ansell & Gash, 2007). In Sukabumi City, participation in handling neglected children has in practice involved multiple stakeholders: Dinas Sosial, Satpol PP, DP2KBP3A, LKSA, IPSM, and, on a case-by-case basis, Dinas Pendidikan yet this involvement is not underwritten by any formal cross-agency instrument. Informant 1 (Dinas Sosial) confirmed that "there is no special decree or formal cooperation agreement governing the handling of neglected children"; participation instead occurs through general communication channels such as telephone calls and digital letters, activated whenever a particular case requires it.

This pattern of inclusive-but-informal participation exists because there is no legal instrument obliging agencies to participate as a standing matter of course; involvement is therefore extended case by case, at the discretion of whichever agency initiates contact, rather than guaranteed as a structural feature of the collaboration.

A similar situational pattern characterizes the exclusivity of the coordination forum. Formal annual coordination meetings last took place in 2024, after which communication shifted to telephone calls, WhatsApp, and official letters activated only around specific joint

operations or cases requiring interagency handling. Informant 2 (Satpol PP) explained that “for special operations like enforcement of regional regulations, we always communicate initially with related agencies before activities, but a specific regular forum for street or neglected children does not yet exist.” Non-government partners are drawn into narrower, sector-specific forums LKSA Ummi Kulsum, for instance, participates in a periodic “panti forum” limited to childcare institutions rather than into a single cross-sector body that includes all relevant actors.

The forum's membership therefore expands and contracts around whichever case is active rather than being fixed by an institutional charter, which explains why some actors (such as Dinas Pendidikan) are included only intermittently despite having a clear stake in the outcome.

With respect to transparency, Dinas Sosial reports that its annual Minimum Service Standards (SPM) target is met at 100 percent; however, that target is calculated only against cases that reach the department through the complaint-based reporting channel. Informant 1 acknowledged that “many neglected children are not reached because they were never reported to Dinas Sosial.” Satpol PP, in turn, reports its outreach results upward to city leadership through a hierarchical chain rather than sharing them horizontally with the other agencies involved in follow-up, while LKSA's service quality is reviewed only once every three years through its operational-permit renewal.

This transparency paradox a 100 percent administrative completion rate coexisting with a large undetected population arises because the SPM indicator was designed to measure the processing of reported cases, not the ratio of detected to actual cases in the population; no metric in the current system tracks that gap. In other words, the instrument in use is not yet fully able to reveal the very problem it needs to reveal, which suggests that transparency here tends to function more as accountability to city leadership than as accountability among the collaborating stakeholders themselves.

Collaborative Process

Face-to-face dialogue has taken various forms: pre-operation coordination meetings, LKSA care institution forums, focus group discussions (FGDs) involving all departments, and situational meetings when cases require joint handling. However, all of these are episodic and not regularly scheduled, making them more of a response to situational pressure than an expression of structured collaborative commitment. Informant 2 (Satpol PP) stated: “for special operations like enforcement of regional regulations, we always communicate initially with related agencies before activities. But a specific regular forum for street or neglected children does not yet exist.”

This episodic pattern occurs because, in the absence of a standing forum, a triggering case is the only mechanism that brings the relevant agencies into the same conversation; without such a trigger, no institutional routine exists to prompt dialogue on its own initiative.

In terms of small wins, the study identified several meaningful achievements: (1) facilitation of civil registration access for neglected children; (2) mapping of children requiring special protection (AMPK) by DP2KBP3A; (3) skills training and direct assistance for children in LKSA, including dispatch to Bandung for vocational training; (4) direct mentoring by Dinas Sosial together with Yayasan Ummi Kulsum; (5) a 24-hour rapid reporting mechanism by IPSM with swift responses from Dinas Sosial; and (6) provision of food packages and social counseling to neglected children. Nevertheless, these achievements have not succeeded in driving collaboration quality toward a more substantive level, given the persistently significant gap between the number of recorded neglected children and those successfully handled.

This stagnation occurs because no joint learning mechanism such as a periodic review meeting or a shared case log exists to convert an individual success into a standing protocol that other cases can draw on. Each small win therefore remains confined to the specific agencies and case in which it occurred, rather than diffusing into an institutionalized practice, which is precisely why a growing list of achievements has not translated into a rising overall handling rate.

DISCUSSION

The research findings indicate that collaborative governance in handling neglected children in Sukabumi City remains at the stage of reactive administrative coordination, falling short of the substantive collaboration conceptualized by Ansell and Gash (2007). The four dimensions are interconnected and mutually weakening in a recurring cycle of inhibition (cycle of inhibition).

Regarding starting conditions, the dual power imbalance found in Sukabumi City contrasts with the findings of Juniarto and Syaefullah (2025) in Bondowoso Regency, where power imbalances among stakeholders were successfully minimized through institutionalized monthly coordination meetings. In Sukabumi City, no equivalent mechanism exists, so imbalances are never resolved in an equal and open forum. Ansell and Gash (2007) affirm that power imbalances not managed through appropriate institutional design will impede the achievement of consensus in the collaborative process. The incentive gap particularly between Satpol PP's order-enforcement orientation and Dinas Sosial's complaint-based SPM orientation aligns with the finding of Nisa et al. (2023) that institutionally mismanaged incentive differences tend to produce partial collaboration.

Beyond confirming the applicability of the Ansell and Gash (2007) framework to a new policy domain, this study offers two contributions to its further development. First, at the theoretical level, it identifies a dual power imbalance configuration formal authority coupled with operational dependency within the same lead agency that differs from the single-direction imbalances (a dominant government actor versus a subordinate community actor) documented in prior applications of the model, such as Juniarto and Syaefullah's (2025) study in Bondowoso. This configuration suggests that starting conditions in resource-constrained local governments may require a more fine-grained power-imbalance typology than the original framework anticipates, since the lead agency can simultaneously be the most powerful and the most dependent actor in the arrangement. Second, at the practical level, the study demonstrates that in a fiscally constrained local-government setting, small wins carry disproportionate weight in sustaining stakeholder commitment relative to what the original model assumes; however, this potential is not realized without a joint learning mechanism to institutionalize such gains. This pattern points to local fiscal capacity and sectoral bureaucratic culture as contextual moderators that future applications of the Ansell and Gash model in local-government settings should incorporate explicitly, rather than treating starting conditions, leadership, design, and process as operating independently of the resource environment in which they are embedded.

Regarding facilitative leadership, trust built on informal mechanisms is demonstrably fragile. Robertson and Choi (2011) affirm that such trust is easily eroded when leadership changes or budgetary pressures arise. This finding diverges from Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh's (2011) integrative collaborative governance framework, which demonstrates that strong facilitative leadership can compensate for unfavorable starting conditions. In Sukabumi

City, the opposite holds: unfavorable starting conditions are further exacerbated by suboptimal facilitative leadership, with both dimensions mutually weakening each other.

Regarding institutional design, the absence of an SK Tim Terpadu reflects what Ansell and Gash (2007) term procedural uncertainty. Rohma, Zakiyah, and Jannah (2023), studying Dinas Sosial in Depok City, similarly found that the absence of formal cross-sector regulations causes handling to remain confined to the internal authority boundaries of each agency. The transparency paradox—SPM targets achieved 100% administratively while many children go undetected indicates that existing transparency functions more as vertical accountability to leadership than horizontal accountability to all stakeholders. Provan and Kenis (2008) argue that the effectiveness of collaborative networks is largely determined by clarity of governance structure and mutually agreed accountability mechanisms.

Regarding the collaborative process, small wins such as civil registration facilitation, LKSA training, and direct mentoring should serve as capital for positive collaborative cycles (Ansell & Gash, 2007). Yet in reality, these achievements have not propelled collaboration toward a more substantive level. Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh (2011) explain that small wins only effectively drive positive cycles when a joint learning mechanism exists that enables stakeholders to reflect on their successes. In Sukabumi City, no such mechanism is available due to the absence of regular coordination forums. Bryson and Crosby (2006) maintain that regular face-to-face forums are a minimum requirement for substantive collaboration to take root.

Overall, the cycle of inhibition in Sukabumi City can be described as follows: imbalanced starting conditions weaken facilitative leadership; weak leadership leaves institutional design fragile; unclear institutional design causes the collaborative process to operate reactively; and a reactive collaborative process fails to generate sufficient learning to improve starting conditions. This cycle can only be broken through structural and comprehensive policy intervention.

Based on these findings and discussion, several improvement recommendations are proposed. First, the Sukabumi City Government together with Dinas Sosial should immediately issue a formal SK Tim Terpadu for Neglected Child Handling involving all stakeholders with clearly defined and legally binding role divisions, to address power imbalances and functional boundary ambiguities. Second, Dinas Sosial should develop a proactive handling mechanism through strengthened community-based identification systems via IPSM at the village level, moving beyond reactive complaint-based approaches. Third, regular cross-sector coordination forums should be immediately established and periodically scheduled so that dialogue and negotiation can occur in a planned and sustainable manner. Fourth, budget allocations for neglected child handling must be increased, particularly for additional operational equipment and sustainable follow-up programs for successfully reached street children. Fifth, LKSA Ummi Kulsum should continually improve its service quality to elevate its accreditation rating above "Sufficient (C)", while the frequency of LKSA evaluations should be increased beyond the current triennial cycle.

CONCLUSION

The process of collaborative governance in handling neglected children in Sukabumi City during 2022–2024 has not been effective. The collaboration that has occurred remains at the stage of reactive administrative coordination, falling short of substantive collaboration as

conceptualized in collaborative governance theory. The four dimensions of the Ansell and Gash (2007) model mutually weaken each other in a recurring cycle of inhibition.

Imbalanced starting conditions are marked by dual power asymmetries, misaligned incentives, and the absence of a formal SK Tim Terpadu. Facilitative leadership remains coordinative-administrative in character, with inter-agency trust fragile because it rests on informal mechanisms. Institutional design is inadequate due to situational participation and transparency that is only vertical in nature. The collaborative process operates episodically and reactively, despite having produced various meaningful small wins that have not yet driven a positive collaborative cycle due to the absence of a joint learning mechanism.

Empirically, this study contributes to the collaborative governance literature by documenting a dual power imbalance pattern, in which a lead agency simultaneously holds formal authority and depends operationally on a subordinate non-government partner a configuration not fully captured by prior single-direction accounts of power imbalance in the collaborative governance literature. It further shows that small wins, while theoretically capable of driving a positive collaborative cycle (Ansell & Gash, 2007), require a joint learning mechanism to do so in practice, particularly in fiscally constrained local-government settings. Practically, the study contributes a locally grounded diagnosis for Sukabumi City government by identifying the absence of a cross-agency legal instrument (SK Tim Terpadu) as the single most consequential institutional gap underlying the four dimensions' mutual weakening, thereby providing a concrete and prioritized entry point for policy intervention rather than a generic call for "better coordination."

This study affirms the relevance of the Ansell and Gash (2007) collaborative governance model in analyzing complex social problem handling at the local level. For future research, comparative studies across cities with different characteristics are recommended to identify contextual factors affecting collaborative governance effectiveness, alongside quantitative research to statistically measure the influence of each dimension. Contextual variables such as local fiscal capacity and bureaucratic culture that tends toward sectoral silos should be incorporated as factors influencing the effectiveness of each dimension in future inquiries.

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