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The Participation Paradox: Institutional Fragmentation and Collaborative Governance in Child Marriage Prevention

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A B S T R A C T
Effective collaborative governance depends on translating stakeholder participation into coordinated collective action. This study examines why broad participation does not necessarily produce effective collaboration in child marriage prevention in Kuantan Singingi Regency, Riau, Indonesia. Using a qualitative case study, it draws on purposively selected stakeholder interviews, policy document analysis, and field observations, analysed thematically. The findings show that formal coordination coexists with fragmented implementation, limited resource sharing, insufficient trust, divergent priorities, and locally embedded norms. The study reconceptualises the participation–collaboration gap as an institutional, relational, and sociocultural governance challenge rather than a problem of inclusion, and points to inter-agency coordination, resource mobilisation, cultural engagement, and preventive education in integrated public policy design.

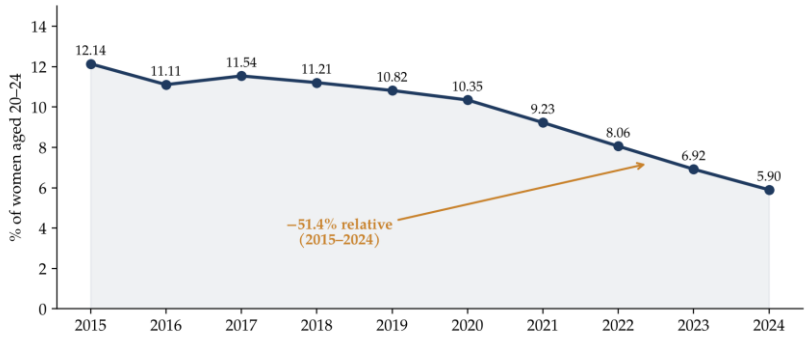
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INTRODUCTION

When stakeholder participation expands but collaborative outcomes remain limited, the governance challenge is not merely to bring actors together, but to translate involvement into collective action. Child marriage prevention illustrates this complexity because it intersects with legal protection, education, public health, religious institutions, family structures, and sociocultural norms. Although governments may establish coordination forums and cross-sectoral programmes, these arrangements do not guarantee sustained collaboration. Participation denotes actors' involvement, whereas collaboration requires trust, shared commitment, resource coordination, and collective problem-solving (Emerson et al., 2012).

In Indonesia, Law No. 16 of 2019 on the Amendment to Law No. 1 of 1974 concerning Marriage established 19 years as the minimum marriage age for women and men. Yet legal reform alone cannot address the institutional, economic, educational, and cultural factors associated with child marriage. Prevention requires local government agencies, schools, health providers, religious authorities, judicial institutions, civil society, and communities to coordinate across different mandates and capacities. In decentralised systems, formal authority is therefore only one element of implementation; local governments must also facilitate inter-organisational relationships and mobilise resources across institutional boundaries.

Official statistics show both progress and persistence. Nationally, the proportion of women aged 20–24 who were married or living together before the age of 18 declined from 12.14% in 2015 to 6.92% in 2023 (Badan Pusat Statistik [BPS], 2024a) and to 5.90% in 2024 (BPS, 2024b), a relative reduction of about 51% over the period (Figure 1). Progress nonetheless remains uneven: in 2024 the rate reached 14.96% in Nusa Tenggara Barat and 14.40% in Papua Selatan, compared with 3.37% in Bali, a gap of more than four times between the highest and lowest provinces (BPS, 2024b).



Source: Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS) data on women aged 20–24 married or living together before age 18, as compiled by GoodStats Data (2024); relative change calculated by the authors.

Figure 1. National Trend of Women Aged 20–24 Married Before Age 18, 2015–2024

A similar pattern appears within Riau Province, where reported child marriage cases declined from 1,032 in 2023 to 497 in 2024 (−51.8%), yet Kuantan Singingi and Indragiri Hilir together accounted for 321 cases (64.6%) in 2024. Kuantan Singingi, a regency of about 360,580 residents with a reported poverty

rate of 7.89% in 2024 (Katadata Insight Center, 2024), recorded the largest absolute decline (156 cases) but remained the district with the highest reported count. These figures show that numerical progress and concentrated vulnerability can coexist, which motivates a closer look at how local stakeholders collaborate.

Existing collaborative governance studies often address environmental management, service delivery, or general inter-organisational networks. Child marriage prevention adds complexities involving family authority, religious interpretation, gender relations, educational vulnerability, and child protection. Indonesian studies in Ogan Komering Ulu, Sumenep, and other districts have mapped stakeholder roles and coordination challenges (Subekti & Ulfah, 2024). Further inquiry is needed into why participation may not develop into sustained collaboration and how fragmentation, resource sharing, priorities, and local norms interact.

This study addresses that gap by examining the participation paradox in child marriage prevention in Kuantan Singingi Regency. Drawing on Ansell and Gash's (2008) framework, it focuses on dialogue, trust, commitment, shared understanding, and intermediate outcomes while considering institutional and sociocultural conditions. Its novelty is to shift attention from who participates to how and under what conditions participation is translated into collaborative action. The study asks why high stakeholder participation does not necessarily produce effective collaboration and identifies institutional, relational, and contextual factors that facilitate or constrain it.

The contribution is both empirical and conceptual. Empirically, the study provides a locally grounded account of multi-stakeholder prevention initiatives at regency level. Conceptually, it distinguishes participatory arrangements from substantive collaboration and highlights the interaction of institutional design, organisational relationships, resource mobilisation, and local context. The analysis offers implications for public administration and policy design, while its case-specific findings are intended for analytical rather than statistical generalisation.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Collaborative Governance: From Participation to Collaboration

Collaborative governance refers to arrangements in which public agencies work directly with non-state stakeholders in a collective, deliberative process aimed at making or implementing public policy. Its central premise is that complex public problems cannot be resolved by a single organisation acting alone. Ansell and Gash (2008) model this process through four broad variables: starting conditions, such as power and resource imbalances and prior histories of cooperation or conflict; institutional design, including inclusiveness, ground rules, and transparency; facilitative leadership; and the collaborative process itself. The process is understood as a cycle of face-to-face dialogue, trust-building, commitment, shared understanding, and intermediate outcomes, which together determine whether stakeholders move from involvement to joint problem-solving.

Integrative Frameworks of Collaboration Dynamics

Emerson et al. (2012) extend this view through the concept of a collaborative governance regime, in which system context and drivers such as leadership, consequential incentives, interdependence, and uncertainty initiate collaboration dynamics. These dynamics consist of principled engagement, shared motivation, and the capacity for joint action. Principled engagement covers discovery, definition, deliberation, and determination among actors; shared motivation comprises mutual trust, mutual understanding, internal legitimacy, and commitment; and capacity for joint action comprises procedural and institutional arrangements, leadership, knowledge, and resources. This framework is useful for the present study because it separates the willingness to engage from the ability to act together, a distinction that corresponds to the gap between participation and collaboration.

Network Governance and Institutional Fragmentation

Where responsibilities are distributed across several organisations, collaboration also has a structural dimension. Provan and Kenis (2008) distinguish three forms of network governance, namely shared governance, a lead organisation, and a network administrative organisation, and argue that their effectiveness depends on contingencies such as trust, the number of participants, goal consensus, and the need for network-level competencies. Fragmentation can be understood in this context as a condition in which actors hold complementary mandates and a broadly shared objective but lack the governance arrangements needed to integrate planning, resources, and accountability. Network characteristics therefore matter as much as the formal presence of coordination forums.

Child Marriage Prevention as a Multilevel Governance Problem

Child marriage is framed in international and national policy as a child-protection concern. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) defines a child as a person below eighteen years unless majority is attained earlier under national law and requires that the best interests of the child be a primary consideration in actions affecting children. In Indonesia, Law No. 16 of 2019 set the minimum marriage age at 19 years for women and men (Republic of Indonesia, 2019). Because the law retains a dispensation mechanism, the legal threshold depends on how courts, families, and community actors handle exceptions, which places weight on coordination among legal, educational, health, and social actors.

Research on the determinants of child marriage adopts a socio-ecological perspective in which individual, interpersonal, community, and structural factors interact (Pourtaheri et al., 2024). Family authority, gender expectations, education, economic circumstances, and community norms all shape marriage decisions (Adriany et al., 2026; Kakal et al., 2023). Prevention therefore cannot rest on legal enforcement alone; it requires coordinated action across sectors and engagement with the sociocultural context in which policies are interpreted. This is why child marriage prevention is an appropriate setting for examining

collaborative governance: the problem is interdependent, multi-sectoral, and embedded in local social relations.

Synthesis and Analytical Focus

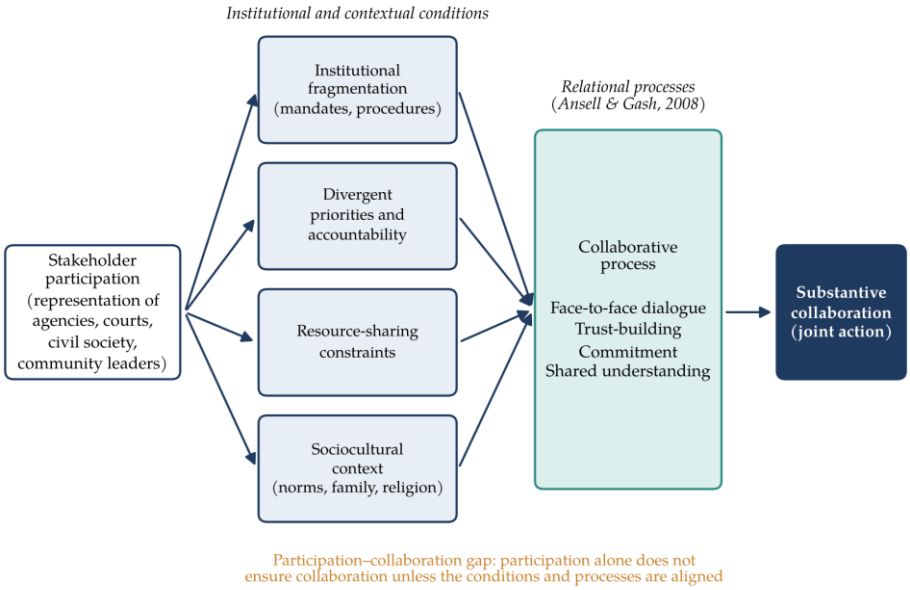
The theoretical perspectives reviewed above are complementary. Ansell and Gash (2008) supply the process dimensions of dialogue, trust, commitment, shared understanding, and intermediate outcomes; Emerson et al. (2012) and Bryson et al. (2006) clarify the role of joint-action capacity, leadership, and accountability; and Provan and Kenis (2008) add the structural question of how a network of stakeholders should be governed. The socio-ecological literature situates these processes within family, community, and legal conditions. Together they inform the analytical framework in Figure 2, which treats stakeholder participation as shaped by institutional and contextual conditions that influence the relational processes through which participation may become substantive collaboration.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Case Selection

This study uses a qualitative case study to examine institutional and relational factors underlying the gap between stakeholder participation and effective collaboration in child marriage prevention. Kuantan Singingi Regency, Riau Province, was selected because prevention involves multiple public and non-state actors, formal coordination arrangements, and locally embedded social practices. The case enables analysis of how fragmented mandates, limited resource sharing, and differing priorities shape collaboration. Ansell and Gash's (2008) model guides attention to face-to-face dialogue, trust-building, commitment, shared understanding, and intermediate outcomes. The design seeks contextual explanation rather than statistical generalisation.

Figure 2 summarises the analytical framework that guides the study, adapted from Ansell and Gash (2008): stakeholder participation is shaped by institutional and contextual conditions, which influence the relational processes that determine whether participation becomes substantive collaboration.



Source: Authors' conceptual synthesis, adapted from Ansell and Gash (2008).

Figure 2. Analytical Framework of the Participation–Collaboration Gap

Data Collection and Sources

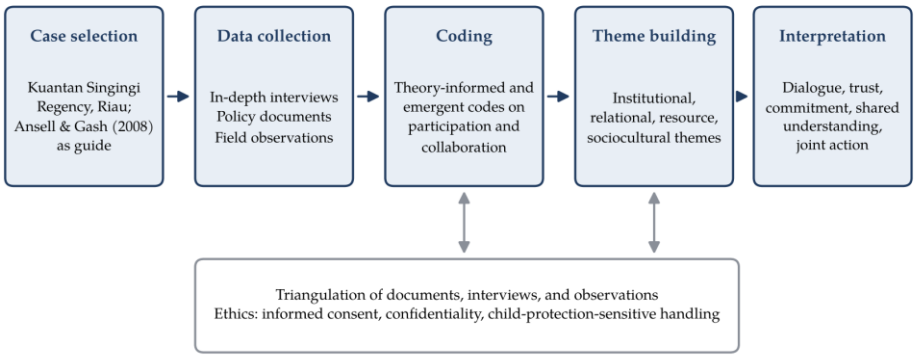
Data were collected through in-depth interviews, policy document analysis, and field observations. Purposively selected interviewees included representatives of the Office of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (DP3A), Health Office, Education Office, religious institutions, Religious Court, civil society organisations, and community leaders. Selection reflected institutional responsibility, expertise, or direct involvement in prevention. Interviews explored stakeholder roles, coordination, communication, trust, shared commitment, resource constraints, and barriers to joint action.

Document analysis covered relevant national legislation, local policy documents, and programme reports to identify formal responsibilities, objectives, and coordination mechanisms. Observations in selected community settings added context on social practices and engagement. Comparing documents, interview accounts, and observations supported triangulation and helped distinguish formal arrangements from reported practices.

Data Analysis and Ethics

Thematic analysis combined theory-informed coding based on Ansell and Gash (2008) with themes emerging from the material. Analysis proceeded by coding evidence on participation, institutional arrangements, and collaborative practices; grouping codes into institutional, relational, resource, and sociocultural themes; and comparing patterns across stakeholder groups and sources. The final interpretation connected these themes to dialogue, trust, commitment, shared understanding, and potential collective action. Participants were informed of the study's purpose and voluntary nature, and informed consent was obtained. Confidentiality, anonymity, and child-protection-sensitive handling of information were maintained.

Figure 3 outlines the research procedure from case selection to interpretation.



Source: Authors' research design.

Figure 3. Research Procedure

RESULTS

Institutional Fragmentation and Formal Participation

Child marriage prevention in Kuantan Singingi involves agencies responsible for women's empowerment, child protection, education, and health, alongside religious institutions, the Religious Court, civil society, and community leaders. Their mandates are complementary, but administrative procedures and operational priorities differ. The key distinction is between institutional representation and integration: having organisations present creates a basis for participation, but does not ensure that responsibilities and activities reinforce one another.

Because prevention links educational continuity, reproductive health, legal protection, religious guidance, and community engagement, sectoral interventions require continuity across organisational boundaries. When coordination remains primarily administrative, stakeholders may participate while implementing activities within their own mandates. Thus, the central issue is not simply the number of actors, but whether arrangements enable joint planning, coordinated intervention, and shared responsibility.

Inter-organisational Relationships

Collaboration depends on the quality of relationships among stakeholders, not just attendance or information exchange. Government agencies, health providers, religious institutions, and community actors approach prevention from different professional perspectives. Sustained face-to-face dialogue is needed to reconcile these perspectives and develop shared understanding. Trust supports information sharing, coordinated activities, and recognition of other actors' contributions; where relationships depend on individuals rather than institutionalised practices, staff turnover or shifting priorities can disrupt continuity.

Likewise, programme participation does not necessarily demonstrate lasting collaborative commitment. Commitment requires sustained involvement

and recognition of interdependence beyond individual activities. Administrative communication transmits information, whereas collaborative dialogue enables negotiation, resolution of differences, and collective problem-solving. These relational conditions explain why stakeholder counts alone are inadequate indicators of collaborative capacity.

Divergent Priorities and Shared Responsibility

Stakeholders share a broad child-protection objective but may define problems and operational priorities differently because of their mandates, professional orientations, performance expectations, and accountability systems. Legal protection, education, healthcare, religious guidance, and community empowerment each address a particular dimension. Differences are not inherently resistance; difficulties arise when coordination offers no mechanism to negotiate priorities and connect sectoral contributions.

Responsibility distributed across institutions does not automatically become collective accountability. Organisations may complete activities consistent with their mandates while the relationship between those activities and the overall prevention strategy remains unclear. Collaborative governance therefore needs mechanisms that connect organisational autonomy with shared objectives, negotiated priorities, and accountability.

Resource-Sharing Constraints

Prevention draws on administrative authority, expertise, funding, information, organisational networks, and community access. The possession of resources by an organisation is distinct from the capacity to mobilise them collectively. Government agencies may provide authority and programme capacity, while civil society, religious institutions, health providers, and community actors contribute local knowledge, advocacy, specialised expertise, or networks. Their combined value depends on arrangements that enable resource mobilisation.

Uneven resources and decision-making authority may affect whose priorities shape programmes. The issue is not necessarily equal distribution, but whether all stakeholders have sufficient capacity and mechanisms to contribute meaningfully. Resource sharing is therefore a governance concern involving identification, mobilisation, coordination, and alignment with shared objectives. Resources alone cannot ensure collaboration without institutional arrangements and willingness to cooperate.

Sociocultural Context

Prevention takes place within family structures, community relationships, religious considerations, and local practices that influence how policy is understood and received. These conditions are part of the governance environment, not merely external obstacles. Community leaders, religious institutions, and civil society can connect formal policy objectives with local understandings, but participation must develop into meaningful engagement that accommodates context while maintaining child-protection objectives.

Administrative procedures can formalise responsibilities and coordination, yet community-level implementation also depends on relationships with local actors. The challenge is to reconcile formal requirements with locally relevant approaches without subordinating child protection to individual preferences. Institutional coordination and sociocultural engagement must therefore be considered together.

Integrated Findings

The participation–collaboration gap is multidimensional. Formal participation provides an organisational starting point; institutional arrangements shape how mandates, priorities, and resources are connected; relational processes influence dialogue, trust, and commitment; and sociocultural conditions shape how these processes operate locally. Their interaction determines whether participation can develop into shared understanding, coordinated responsibilities, resource mobilisation, and substantive collaboration. The framework is a conceptual synthesis, not a measured causal model.

Table 1. Institutional and Contextual Factors Shaping Collaborative Governance in Child Marriage Prevention and Their Administrative Implications

Dimension	Central finding	Administrative implication
Institutional fragmentation	Multiple mandates do not ensure integrated implementation.	Connect responsibilities to shared objectives.
Relationships	Participation differs from sustained dialogue, trust, and commitment.	Institutionalise relational processes.
Divergent priorities	Common goals may not yield common operational priorities.	Negotiate priorities and accountability.
Resource sharing	Organisational resources are not automatically collective.	Enable joint resource mobilisation.
Sociocultural context	Formal arrangements operate within local social conditions.	Link coordination with community engagement.

Source: Authors' synthesis of interview, policy document, and field observation analysis.

Statistical Profile of Reported Child Marriage Outcomes

The qualitative findings are situated within a quantitative outcome context. Nationally, the proportion of women aged 20–24 married or living together before the age of 18 fell from 12.14% in 2015 (BPS, 2024a) to 5.90% in 2024 (BPS, 2024b), an absolute decline of 6.24 percentage points or 51.4% in relative terms (Figure 1). The pace accelerated over time: the average annual decline was about 0.33 percentage points between 2015 and 2019, about 0.98 points between 2019 and 2023, and 1.02 points between 2023 and 2024 (authors' calculation).

Provincial dispersion nevertheless remains large (Table 2). In 2023 the ten highest provinces ranged from 8.93% in Kepulauan Bangka Belitung to 17.32% in Nusa Tenggara Barat, and all exceeded the national rate of 6.92% (BPS, 2024c). In 2024 Nusa Tenggara Barat remained 2.5 times the national rate (14.96% against 5.90%), whereas Bali recorded 3.37%, or 0.57 times the national rate (BPS, 2024b). Declines were also uneven: between 2023 and 2024 the national rate fell by 14.7% and Nusa Tenggara Barat by 13.6%, but Sulawesi Barat by only 4.8%, so high-

prevalence provinces were not uniformly converging toward the national average.

Table 2. Child Marriage Prevalence among Women Aged 20–24, National and Selected Provinces, 2023–2024

Area	2023 (%)	2024 (%)	Change (pp)	Ratio to national, 2024
National	6.92	5.90	−1.02	1.00
Nusa Tenggara Barat	17.32	14.96	−2.36	2.54
Papua Selatan	–	14.40	–	2.44
Sulawesi Barat	11.25	10.71	−0.54	1.82
Sulawesi Tengah	–	9.06	–	1.54
Bali	–	3.37	–	0.57

– = not available in the sources consulted; pp = percentage points. Changes and ratios calculated by the authors.

Source: Badan Pusat Statistik data for 2023 and 2024, as compiled by GoodStats Data.

Administrative data for Riau Province show a similar combination of decline and concentration (Table 3; Figures 4 and 5). Reported cases fell from 1,032 in 2023 to 497 in 2024 (−51.8%), yet Kuantan Singingi and Indragiri Hilir accounted for 321 cases (64.6%) in 2024. Because Riau comprises 12 regencies and cities, these two districts represent about 16.7% of the administrative units but carry 64.6% of reported cases, a concentration ratio of about 3.9, up from about 3.3 in 2023. The average caseload was about 161 per district in the two districts, compared with about 18 in each of the remaining ten, a ninefold gap that had widened from roughly sixfold in 2023. Because the BPS indicator is survey-based prevalence among women aged 20–24 whereas the Riau figures are reported administrative cases, the two series are not directly comparable.

Table 3. Reported Child Marriage Cases in Riau Province, 2023–2024

Indicator	2023	2024	Change
Riau Province, total reported cases	1,032	497	−535 (−51.8%)
Kuantan Singingi and Indragiri Hilir*	≈565	321	≈−244 (≈−43.2%)
Other ten districts*	≈467	176	≈−291 (≈−62.3%)
Share of the two districts in provincial cases	≈54.7%	64.6%	+≈9.9 percentage points
Mean cases per district, two districts*	≈283	161	≈−122 (≈−43.2%)
Mean cases per district, other ten*	≈47	18	≈−29 (≈−62.3%)
Concentration ratio†	≈3.3	3.9	+≈0.6

* Approximated from the reported 2023 share of 54.7% (0.547 × 1,032); other districts = provincial total minus the two districts. † Share of cases divided by share of districts (2 of 12 regencies and cities = 16.7%).

Source: Reported administrative data on child marriage cases in Riau Province, 2023–2024, as presented in this study; changes, shares, means, and approximated values calculated by the authors.

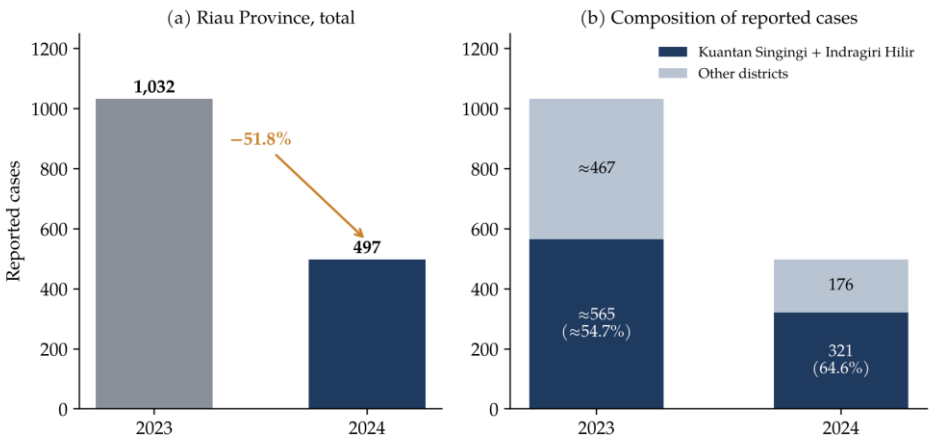


Figure 4. Reported Child Marriage Cases in Riau Province, 2023–2024

Source: Authors' calculation based on reported administrative data, Riau Province, 2023–2024; ≈ denotes values approximated from the reported 54.7% share.

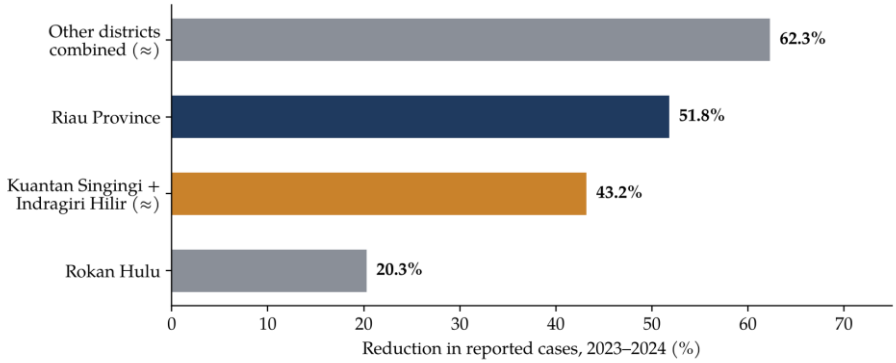


Figure 5. Reduction in Reported Cases by Territorial Group, 2023–2024

Source: Authors' calculation based on reported administrative data, Riau Province, 2023–2024; ≈ denotes values approximated from the reported 54.7% share.

These statistics reinforce the qualitative themes. Where outcomes improve unevenly across territories, uniform coordination arrangements are unlikely to match local conditions, and the concentration of cases in two districts is consistent with the institutional fragmentation, resource-sharing constraints, and sociocultural conditions described above, although the administrative data cannot establish causal links.

DISCUSSION

Interpreting the Participation Paradox through Collaborative Governance Theory

The results can be interpreted through the starting conditions, institutional design, facilitative leadership, and collaborative process emphasised by Ansell and Gash (2008). In Kuantan Singingi, the starting conditions for participation are present: agencies with complementary mandates, a shared child-protection objective, and formal coordination arrangements. What appears less developed is the collaborative process itself. Where dialogue remains administrative, trust depends on individuals, and commitment is expressed through programme attendance rather than shared responsibility, the process cannot generate the shared understanding that Ansell and Gash (2008) identify

as a basis for intermediate outcomes. Participation in this sense functions as an input, whereas collaboration is the process that converts inputs into joint action; the paradox arises when the first is mistaken for the second.

Emerson et al. (2012) offer a complementary explanation by locating collaboration in the interaction among principled engagement, shared motivation, and the capacity for joint action. The findings suggest that the third element is the binding constraint: organisations may be willing to engage, yet limited resource mobilisation, divergent accountability systems, and the absence of mechanisms to negotiate priorities restrict their ability to act together. This is consistent with Bryson et al. (2006), who treat cross-sector collaboration as dependent on leadership, process, and accountability arrangements in addition to initial agreement among partners.

Network governance research adds a structural dimension. Provan and Kenis (2008) argue that the appropriate form of network governance depends on trust, the number of participants, goal consensus, and the need for network-level competencies. A prevention network that spans at least seven institutional categories, with a broadly shared objective but uneven trust and resources, is unlikely to be coordinated effectively through voluntary, informal exchange alone. A designated lead organisation with a clear mandate to convene actors, broker priorities, and maintain shared information is therefore a plausible design response, although this inference requires empirical testing. Imperial (2005) likewise shows that institutional arrangements and context influence collaborative performance, which reinforces the need to read the Kuantan Singingi case as the product of both its formal design and its local setting.

Aggregate Progress and Unequal Outcomes

Reported child marriage cases in Riau declined from 1,032 in 2023 to 497 in 2024, a 51.8% reduction. Yet Kuantan Singingi and Indragiri Hilir accounted for 321 cases (64.6%) in 2024. Aggregate progress therefore coexists with territorial concentration. Pekanbaru and Pelalawan recorded zero cases, while Rokan Hulu's reduction was 20.3%; Kuantan Singingi had the largest absolute decline (156 cases) but remained the district with the highest reported count. Percentages and absolute caseloads measure different aspects, and zero recorded cases require validation before being treated as elimination.

Evidence indicates that raising the minimum marriage age can affect marriage timing and, under some conditions, education and employment, but outcomes vary with enforcement and context (Wilson, 2022). Indonesian research documents longer-term disadvantages associated with early marriage (Cameron et al., 2023); minimum-age laws may coexist with exceptions and gender disparities (Arthur et al., 2017), while education and economic support are relevant prevention strategies (Malhotra & Elnakib, 2021). The Riau decline should nonetheless be interpreted as a change in reported administrative outcomes, not proof that a particular intervention caused it; registration, reporting, socioeconomic change, and family behaviour may also matter. This supports distinguishing reduction-oriented from distribution-sensitive effectiveness.

The two-level pattern is analytically important. When the 2024 national figure of 5.90% is compared with a provincial range from 3.37% in Bali to 14.96% in Nusa Tenggara Barat (BPS, 2024b), a gap of more than fourfold, the unevenness observed within Riau appears as a recurrent pattern across scales rather than an isolated feature. Applying the same lens inside Riau, the approximated reduction of 43.2% in Kuantan Singingi and Indragiri Hilir, against about 62.3% in the remaining districts (Table 3; Figure 5), indicates that the highest-burden territories improved more slowly in relative terms. Combined with the participation paradox, this suggests, as a hypothesis rather than a finding, that the areas where prevention is most needed may also be those where participation is hardest to translate into collaboration. Testing this proposition would require comparable collaboration indicators across districts.

Territorial Inequality and Local Administrative Capacity

The share of reported cases in Kuantan Singingi and Indragiri Hilir rose from approximately 54.7% in 2023 to 64.6% in 2024, despite the provincial decline. This pattern identifies a territorial implementation concern, but the administrative data do not establish that local capacity, educational access, socioeconomic vulnerability, or coordination caused the concentration. Reviews show variation in prevalence and determinants across settings and interactions among individual, interpersonal, community, and structural factors (Pourtaheri et al., 2024); school progression and community norms are also relevant (Kidman et al., 2024).

Local context adds interpretive caution. With a reported poverty rate of 7.89% in 2024 (Katadata Insight Center, 2024), headline poverty alone cannot establish why caseloads concentrate in particular districts. Administrative arrangements, school progression, community norms, and the use of legal exceptions may interact in ways that aggregate indicators do not capture, which is why the concentration is treated here as a signal for further inquiry rather than as evidence of differential performance.

Uniform interventions may not respond to different local conditions. Targeted prevention, educational assistance, coordination, and monitoring may be appropriate in high-burden areas, alongside data validation in districts with very low counts. Equity-oriented administration does not mean identical resource allocation; it means matching support to local needs while maintaining minimum protection standards. Territorial concentration is thus a signal for further inquiry, not proof of differentiated administrative performance.

Educational Continuity as Protection

A decline in reported marriages does not establish whether girls remain in school, drop out, or return to education after marriage. Research links child marriage with school dropout and educational disadvantage (Vasconcelos & Griebeler, 2024), while domestic work, pregnancy, childcare, social expectations, and limited support can obstruct continuity (Mbamba, 2023). Education can also prevent early marriage: evidence includes the association between education and early marriage in rural Indonesia (Fitria et al., 2024), scholarship interventions in

Niger (Giacobino et al., 2024), and tuition-free secondary education (Bhuwania et al., 2023).

Indonesian studies identify education as a factor associated with female child marriage (Kuswanto et al., 2024), and conditional cash transfers have been associated with reductions among rural girls (Priebe & Sumarto, 2025). The present administrative data cannot establish school dropout or re-entry patterns in Kuantan Singingi and Indragiri Hilir. Future evaluation should therefore include school retention, re-entry, completion, social assistance, and referral indicators. Educational continuity distinguishes preventing an event from protecting a girl's longer-term life trajectory.

Gendered Vulnerability and Socio-ecological Conditions

Child marriage is embedded in family authority, economic circumstances, educational opportunities, gender expectations, community norms, and institutional support. Indonesian research highlights these social and structural contexts (Adriany et al., 2026), while a socio-ecological synthesis identifies interactions across individual, interpersonal, community, and structural levels (Pourtaheri et al., 2024). Family authority and gender expectations can constrain young people's influence over marriage decisions (Kakal et al., 2023), and education, knowledge, family circumstances, and social beliefs shape prevention perspectives (Naghizadeh et al., 2021).

High reported caseloads should not automatically be attributed to low awareness or family unwillingness. Poverty does not inevitably cause child marriage, but insecurity may narrow perceived alternatives. Research identifies socioeconomic circumstances and food insecurity as relevant vulnerabilities (Gambir et al., 2024), while economic development and weather shocks can influence patterns (Dietrich et al., 2022). Data quality also matters when interpreting trends among poorer populations (Batyra & Pesando, 2024). Legal enforcement and awareness should therefore be complemented, where feasible, by education, social protection, cash transfers, and livelihood support (Priebe & Sumarto, 2025). Prevention is a multilevel governance challenge, not solely an individual behavioural intervention.

Marriage Dispensation and the Legal–Cultural Interface

Law No. 16 of 2019 on the Amendment to Law No. 1 of 1974 concerning Marriage raised the minimum marriage age to 19 years for women and men, yet the continued availability of marriage dispensation means that the legal threshold operates as a rebuttable standard rather than an absolute barrier. This design places considerable weight on the way courts, families, and community actors handle exceptions. From a collaborative governance perspective, dispensation is therefore not merely a judicial procedure but a point at which the legal, educational, health, and child-protection sectors meet. Where the Religious Court, DP3A, health providers, and schools do not share information or assessments, a request for dispensation may be considered in isolation from the child's educational situation, health risks, and family circumstances.

This interpretation is consistent with the finding that locally embedded norms and dispensation mechanisms complicate the alignment between policy

objectives and community practices. It also points to a practical coordination task: establishing referral and assessment pathways around dispensation requests, together with engagement of community and religious leaders who shape how the legal minimum is understood locally. The study did not measure dispensation volumes, so this argument is an interpretation of the qualitative evidence rather than a quantified effect.

Multidimensional Policy Effectiveness

Policy research has examined determinants, consequences, and intervention effects, often as separate strands (Greene et al., 2024). This study brings the issues into a subnational public administration perspective. It proposes assessing effectiveness through three connected dimensions: reduction (change in reported cases), equity (distribution of progress across territories and groups), and substantive protection (educational continuity and access to support).

The framework prevents numerical decline from being treated as sufficient evidence of success: reductions may coexist with local vulnerability, and marriage statistics do not reveal educational outcomes. In Riau, the 51.8% decline indicates numerical progress, while the 64.6% concentration in two districts signals a distributional concern. Substantive protection cannot yet be assessed without individual or longitudinal education data. The framework is a conceptual proposal, not a validated measurement instrument; its value lies in connecting administrative outcomes, territorial equity, and meaningful protection. Table 4 summarises how the three dimensions apply to the Riau data.

Table 4. Multidimensional Assessment of Policy Effectiveness Applied to Riau Data

Dimension	Indicator	Evidence in this study	Assessment
Reduction	Change in reported cases	1,032 to 497 cases (−51.8%)	Numerical progress
Equity	Distribution of cases across territories	64.6% of 2024 cases in two districts (≈54.7% in 2023)	Distributional concern
Substantive protection	School retention, re-entry, completion, and referrals	No individual or longitudinal education data available	Cannot yet be assessed

Source: Authors' conceptual synthesis based on reported Riau administrative data, 2023–2024.

Proposed Integrated Collaborative Governance Model

Building on the findings, Figure 6 proposes an integrated model that converts participation into collaboration. The model has four layers. The first comprises the participating stakeholders: government agencies, religious institutions, the Religious Court, civil society, and community leaders. The second is a governance core consisting of a cross-sectoral coordination forum with a designated lead, a process for negotiating shared priorities and accountability, joint resourcemobilisation, relational routines that sustain dialogue and trust, and an integrated data and monitoring system. The third comprises the intervention streams that the core coordinates: legal enforcement and dispensation screening, preventive education and school retention, health services, cultural and religious engagement, and social protection. The fourth is

the set of outcomes, assessed through reduction, equity, and substantive protection. Sociocultural context envelops all layers, and a feedback loop from outcome monitoring to the governance core supports adaptive learning.

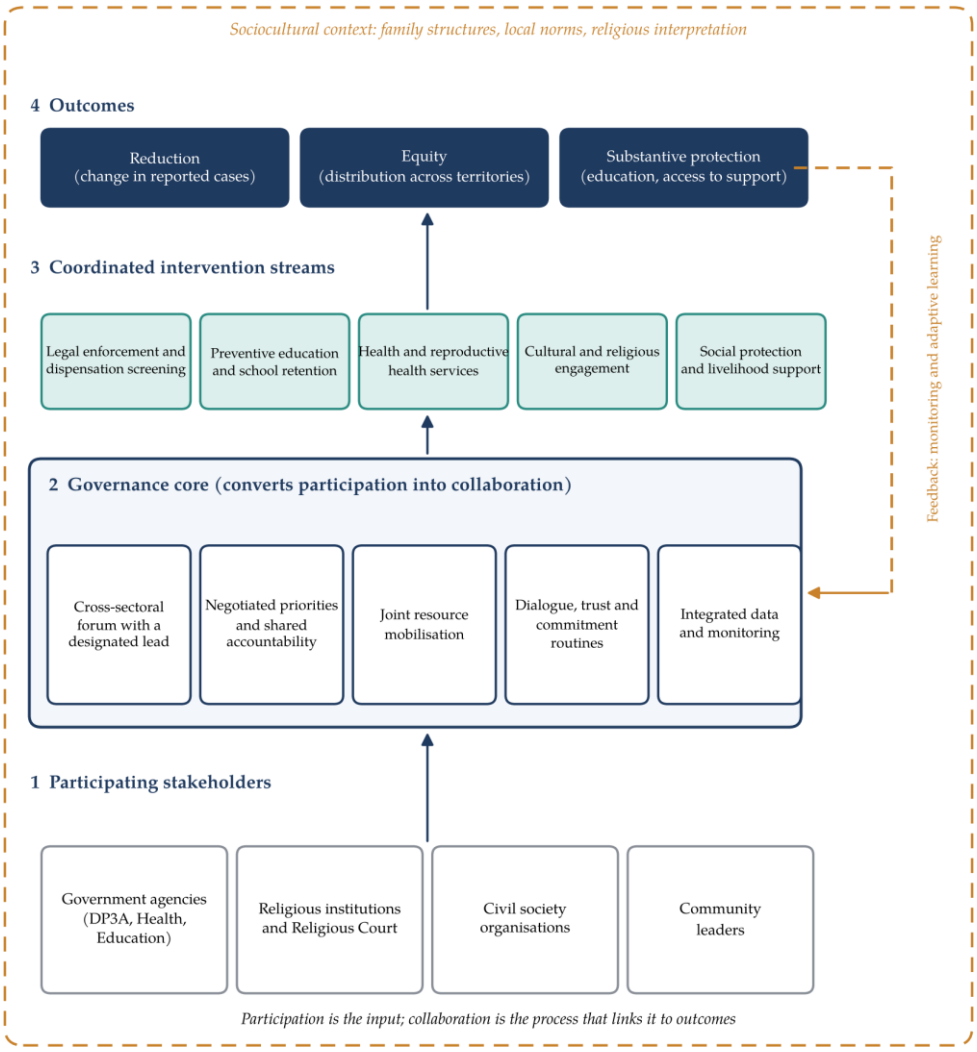


Figure 6. Proposed Integrated Collaborative Governance Model for Child Marriage Prevention

Source: Authors' conceptual synthesis based on the findings of this study and Ansell and Gash (2008).

The model differs from a conventional coordination structure in three ways. It treats relational processes, and not only formal procedures, as components that require deliberate design. It places resource mobilisation and priority negotiation inside the governance core instead of leaving them to individual agencies. And it links outcome evaluation to the three-dimensional framework introduced above, so that numerical decline, territorial distribution, and educational continuity are monitored together. Table 5 specifies the components, their functions, and indicative indicators.

Table 5. Components of the Proposed Integrated Collaborative Governance Model

Component	Function	Indicative indicator
Cross-sectoral forum with a designated lead	Convenes actors, brokers priorities, and maintains joint planning	Joint annual work plan with shared targets
Negotiated priorities and shared accountability	Connects sectoral mandates to common objectives	Documented agreement on priorities and responsibilities
Joint resource mobilisation	Pools authority, funds, expertise, information, and networks	Share of prevention activities co-delivered or co-financed
Dialogue, trust, and commitment routines	Sustains face-to-face problem-solving beyond individuals	Regular joint problem-solving sessions; continuity of focal persons
Integrated data and monitoring	Validates records and tracks outcomes across dimensions	Validated case counts by district; school retention, re-entry, and referrals
Legal–cultural interface	Links dispensation screening with community and religious engagement	Dispensation requests referred for joint assessment

Source: Authors' conceptual synthesis of the findings; indicators are indicative and have not been validated.

The model is a conceptual proposal derived from a single case and the literature reviewed; it has not been implemented or empirically tested, and its components should be read as design hypotheses. Comparative case studies, process tracing of coordination forums, and, where data permit, quantitative analysis linking collaboration indicators to district-level outcomes would be needed to refine and validate it.

Implications for Public Administration

The findings suggest five policy directions. First, adopt place-sensitive implementation that responds to local vulnerability without abandoning province-wide standards. Second, connect education, health, child protection, social welfare, religious affairs, and community development through joint planning, information sharing, referrals, monitoring, and clear accountability. Third, expand monitoring beyond marriage counts to include school retention, re-entry, completion, social assistance, and protection referrals. Fourth, validate records, including zero-case reports, and maintain surveillance. Fifth, integrate prevention with educational reintegration and continued support for girls already married (Khan et al., 2024). These are proposed directions, not interventions whose effectiveness has already been established in Kuantan Singingi; feasibility depends on mandates, resources, and community needs.

Novelty and Theoretical Contribution

The study connects aggregate outcomes with territorial inequality and substantive protection in a decentralised administrative setting. Its novelty is a conceptualisation of effectiveness through reduction, equity, and protection, moving beyond numerical targets to the distribution and meaning of outcomes. It also links administrative patterns with institutional and socioeconomic explanations. This extends outcome-oriented policy evaluation conceptually;

comparative and longitudinal studies are needed to refine and test the framework.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study identifies a participation paradox in child marriage prevention in Kuantan Singingi: broad involvement and formal coordination do not automatically produce effective collaborative governance. The analysis highlights institutional fragmentation, limited resource sharing, divergent priorities, insufficient trust, and sociocultural conditions as interconnected challenges. Participation is an organisational starting point, whereas collaboration requires sustained dialogue, shared understanding, commitment, coordinated responsibilities, and collective mobilisation of resources.

The discussion further shows that policy effectiveness should not be reduced to aggregate case decline. The 2023–2024 reduction in reported cases represents numerical progress, but concentration in Kuantan Singingi and Indragiri Hilir raises questions of territorial equity. Educational continuity and access to protection are also substantive outcomes that require additional data. The study proposes an integrated evaluation perspective combining reduction, equity, and protection, alongside place-sensitive implementation, inter-agency coordination, data validation, and educational reintegration. The proposed integrated collaborative governance model offers a conceptual starting point for converting participation into collaboration, pending empirical validation. Because the research is grounded in one local case and the proposed framework remains conceptual, findings are analytically transferable rather than statistically generalisable.

FURTHER STUDY

This study is grounded in a single local case, and the proposed framework is a conceptual synthesis rather than a measured causal model or a validated measurement instrument; its findings are therefore analytically transferable rather than statistically generalisable. Comparative and longitudinal studies are needed to refine and test the framework and the proposed integrated model. Future evaluation should also include school retention, re-entry, completion, social assistance, and protection referral indicators, as well as validation of administrative records, so that substantive protection can be assessed alongside reduction and equity.

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