

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF POVERTY REDUCTION POLICIES IN THE 2025–2029 RPJMA ACEH

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Abstract

Poverty remains a major development issue in Aceh despite the province's substantial fiscal space through the Special Autonomy Fund. This study aims to analyze how poverty, development actors, and collaborative governance are constructed in the Aceh Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMA) 2025–2029. This study uses a qualitative approach with a constructivist paradigm and Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis method. The research data source is the Aceh RPJMA 2025–2029 document, which is analyzed using Fairclough's three dimensions: text analysis, discursive practices, and social practices. The results show that poverty in the Aceh RPJMA is constructed as an issue structurally subordinate to the agenda of Aceh's identity and uniqueness. The discourse of collaborative governance is not strongly and consistently present in the strategic formulation of poverty alleviation policies, in contrast to issues such as health, education, and research-innovation, which explicitly present collaborative narratives. Furthermore, fragmentation of accountability is found through the use of separate poverty indicators between the macroeconomic and social welfare domains without a clear integration mechanism. These findings demonstrate a gap between development rhetoric that ambitiously targets poverty reduction and the limited collaborative institutional design. This research contributes to the development of public policy studies by demonstrating that development planning documents constitute a discursive arena that represents power relations, development priorities, and the construction of policy governance.

Keywords: Poverty, Aceh RPJMA, Critical Discourse Analysis, Collaborative Governance, Local Politics.

INTRODUCTION

Poverty remains one of the most fundamental development issues facing almost all developing countries, including Indonesia. Poverty is no longer understood narrowly as a lack of income or low consumption, but rather as a multidimensional problem encompassing limited access to education, health, decent work, and participation in public decision-making processes. Sen (1999) asserts that poverty is essentially a form of capability deprivation that limits individuals' substantive freedom to live a valuable life. Therefore, its solution cannot be reduced to a mere issue of budget transfers, but must be understood as a comprehensive governance issue.

This shift in perspective has important implications for public policy studies. The effectiveness of poverty alleviation policies is not solely determined by the size of the government's budget allocation, but also by the quality of governance, the coherence of policy design, and the capacity for cross-actor collaboration in formulating and implementing programs. From a contemporary public administration perspective, the success of social policy is greatly influenced by the extent to which its formulation process equally involves state and non-state actors, as well as by the political dynamics surrounding the process. Development planning documents are not merely value-free technocratic instruments, but rather arenas where interests, power, and discourse interact to determine policy direction.

Aceh Province is a relevant case study for examining this issue in greater depth. As a post-conflict and post-tsunami region with special autonomy status, Aceh has received relatively broad fiscal authority through the Special Autonomy Fund (Otsus), one of the largest among regions receiving similar funds in Indonesia. The Otsus Fund is allocated to support infrastructure development, community economic empowerment, and poverty alleviation, under

the legal umbrella of Law Number 11 of 2006 concerning the Governance of Aceh and its derivative qanuns (Maulana et al., 2018). This substantial fiscal space theoretically gives the Aceh government greater flexibility than other provinces to design and execute comprehensive poverty alleviation programs. However, empirical data reveals a striking paradox. The Central Statistics Agency (BPS) recorded that in March 2025, the percentage of poor people in Aceh remained at 12.33 percent, equivalent to approximately 704,690 people, making Aceh the province with the highest poverty rate on the island of Sumatra. This figure is far above both the national and regional poverty averages for Sumatra, although the long-term trend shows a significant decline since the post-tsunami period. Regencies such as North Aceh and Pidie are recorded as contributing the largest number of poor people, indicating spatial disparities in the distribution of development benefits at the district/city level.

This phenomenon raises a fundamental question: why has a region with relatively large fiscal space and special regulatory support not been able to significantly reduce poverty to the point of escaping its position as the poorest in Sumatra? Previous studies on fiscal decentralization in Aceh even show that not all fiscal transfer instruments, such as the Special Allocation Fund and Revenue Sharing Fund, have had a significant impact on poverty reduction, while the effectiveness of their management still faces challenges in targeting accuracy and distribution efficiency (Kurniawati et al., 2025). This condition indicates that the problem of poverty in Aceh cannot be explained solely through a fiscal approach, but needs to be traced down to the level of policy formulation itself.

The Aceh Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMA) for 2025–2029, established through Aceh Qanun Number 10 of 2025, is a five-year development planning document that contains the vision of “Aceh Islamic, Advanced, Dignified, and Sustainable” along with policy directions, priority programs, and regional development performance indicators. Of the ten priority programs established, poverty reduction occupies a strategic position, in line with the target of reducing the percentage of poverty coupled with the average economic growth target of 4.5–6.0 percent until 2029. As an official, legally binding document, the RPJMA is generally understood as a technocratic product resulting from rational and neutral planning work. However, the drafting process actually involved intensive political negotiations between the Aceh Government and the Aceh People's Representative Council (DPRA), as evident from the stages of submitting the draft qanun, discussions across factions, and reaching a joint agreement in a plenary session. Thus, the RPJMA cannot be viewed as a mere technocratic document, but also as a political product that reflects the results of negotiations between various actors with interests that are not always aligned.

This political character is increasingly relevant to examine given Aceh's unique political institutional context compared to other provinces in Indonesia. Following the signing of the Helsinki MoU in 2005, Aceh received special authority to form local political parties, which subsequently became dominant political forces in the DPRA (Regional People's Representative Council) and in the executive government of districts/cities (Andriyansyah, 2020). The presence of local parties, the relationship between the Aceh Government and the DPRA, the interests of post-conflict elites, and the dynamics of negotiations in the preparation of development planning documents form a political context that cannot be separated from the process of determining development priorities, including poverty alleviation priorities. Within this framework, questions regarding who sets the agenda, which actors receive representation, and which interests are more dominant in the RPJMA are crucial to answer, as they will significantly determine the design and direction of poverty alleviation policies themselves.

On the other hand, the complexity of poverty issues demands a mitigation approach that no longer relies exclusively on government capacity. Ansell and Gash (2008) introduced the concept of collaborative governance as a governance model that brings together state and non-state actors in a collective forum to reach consensus-based decisions, with success factors such as a history of conflict or previous cooperation, incentives for participation, power and resource imbalances, facilitative leadership, and institutional design.

This framework was later refined by Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh (2012) through an integrative model that places collaborative governance in three nested dimensions: the broader system context, the collaborative governance regime, and internal collaborative dynamics and actions that include principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action. In the context of poverty alleviation in Aceh, this kind of collaboration ideally involves the Aceh Government, district/city governments, universities, the business world, civil society organizations, traditional institutions, and the mass media. Studies in various regions in Indonesia, from Kulon Progo Regency (Sadayi et al., 2022), Mataram City (Pratama, 2023), Bojonegoro Regency (Taqiyah, 2024), to Sinjai Regency (Asran et al., 2025) consistently show that the effectiveness of poverty alleviation programs is largely determined by the extent to which the cross-sectoral collaboration process runs substantively, not merely as a formality. The question then is, whether this collaborative spirit is truly reflected substantively in the Aceh RPJMA, or is collaboration merely presented as normative rhetoric without a clear institutional design.

It should be emphasized that this research is not intended to directly observe political processes or collaborative practices between actors as they occur in the field. Local politics and collaborative governance in this study are positioned as a theoretical framework for interpreting textual traces found in the RPJMA, such as linguistic compromises, repetition of normative terms, or unclear institutional mechanisms, rather than as separate objects of empirical observation that require field data outside the document. Thus, the findings of this study illustrate how poverty, development actors, and collaboration are discursively constructed in official documents, not how these political and collaborative processes actually occur in the practice of governance. This assertion is important to ensure that the scope and claims of the research remain proportional to the text-based analysis design used.

To date, studies on collaborative governance in poverty alleviation in Indonesia, including the findings of Lawelai and Nurmandi (2023), who reviewed the collaborative governance model for poverty alleviation nationally, have generally focused on evaluating implementation, program effectiveness, and performance indicator achievements at the district/city level. While this approach is crucial for assessing policy performance, it is insufficient to explain how the issue of poverty itself is discursively constructed in policy documents, who is positioned as a key actor, and how power relations are shaped through word choice, argumentative frameworks, and official government narratives. Implementation studies tend to accept the definitions of poverty and policy designs contained in official documents as given, without questioning the discourse-forming processes behind them. Yet, the way a policy document frames the issue of poverty will significantly determine the types of solutions deemed legitimate and relevant for implementation.

To address this gap, this study employs Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis approach . Fairclough (2010) developed a three-dimensional discourse analysis model encompassing text analysis , discursive practice , and social practice , with the assumption that language not only reflects reality but also shapes and reproduces power relations in society. This approach has been widely applied to analyze public policy discourse in Indonesia, ranging from discourses on religious moderation, food security, to discourses on educational equality programs, which consistently demonstrate that official government documents and statements function as instruments of political legitimacy as well as representations of power relations between actors. By the same logic, the Aceh RPJMA 2025–2029 can be read not only as a technocratic roadmap, but as a text that constructs a particular narrative about poverty, positions certain actors as dominant or marginalized, and constructs the meaning of collaborative governance in a particular way.

A review of the existing literature shows that research on poverty, local politics, and collaborative governance in Aceh has each developed as relatively separate areas of study. On the one hand, there are studies focusing on poverty evaluation and the effectiveness of the Special Autonomy Fund (Kurniawati et al., 2025); on the other, studies on the dynamics of local political parties and post-conflict power relations (Andriyansyah, 2020); and on the other, studies on the implementation of collaborative governance in poverty alleviation programs in various regions (Sadayi et al., 2022; Pratama, 2023; Taqiyah, 2024; Asran et al., 2025). However, to date, no research has been found that specifically utilizes the RPJMA as the primary object of analysis of the construction of poverty alleviation policy discourse, utilizing local political and collaborative governance perspectives as a framework for interpreting the policy text. This void constitutes the academic gap (research gap) that this research aims to fill.

This study offers a relatively new approach by reading the Aceh RPJMA 2025–2029 not as a neutral technical document, but as a discursive arena where poverty is interpreted, development actors are positioned, and collaboration patterns in policy governance are textually constructed. By making the local political perspective and collaborative governance theory as a framework for interpreting the results of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, this study is expected to provide a richer understanding of how poverty alleviation policies in Aceh are represented textually, while also providing academic contributions to the development of public policy discourse studies in regions with special autonomy contexts. Based on this background, this study aims to analyze how poverty, development actors, and collaborative governance are constructed in the Aceh RPJMA 2025–2029 through Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis approach.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a constructivist paradigm, because the focus of the research is not on measuring the causal relationship between variables, but rather on a deep understanding of how the meaning of poverty, local politics, and collaborative governance is constructed textually in policy documents. The constructivist paradigm believes that social reality, including the reality of public policy, is not something given and singular, but rather the result of social construction formed through language, interaction, and power relations between actors (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Within this framework, the Aceh RPJMA 2025–2029 is not treated as an objective reflection of the poverty conditions in Aceh, but rather as a text that actively constructs, rather than merely reflects, certain meanings regarding poverty, development actors, and patterns of collaboration between stakeholders. In line with this paradigm, the method used in this study is Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which was chosen because of its ability to connect three levels of analysis at once, namely text, discursive practices, and social practices, thus enabling researchers not only to read "what is said" by the RPJMA, but also "how" the discourse is produced and "why" the discourse is formed in a particular socio-political context (Fairclough, 2010). This three-dimensional character is relevant to the needs of this study, which does not merely want to capture the narrative of poverty in the document, but also wants to explain its relationship with local political dynamics and the construction of collaborative governance.

The object and sole source of data in this study is the Aceh Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMA) document for 2025–2029, stipulated in Aceh Qanun Number 10 of 2025 (Aceh Government, 2025). This study does not analyze the entire document evenly, but rather focuses the analysis on sections that are directly relevant to the research theme, namely sections containing strategic regional development issues, conditions and targets for poverty reduction, development policy directions, development strategies, development priorities, and governance. This limitation is carried out so that the analysis can be carried out in-depth on the parts of the document that are most relevant to the construction of poverty discourse, in line with the character of CDA which emphasizes depth of interpretation rather than breadth of text coverage. The RPJMA is treated as a single text that is analyzed through close reading, without collecting additional process documents (such as meeting minutes or internal discussion scripts) as new primary data.

single-document design choice is commonly used in Critical Discourse Analysis studies, because the core of CDA is to uncover how language in a text shapes and reproduces meaning and power relations (Fairclough, 2010), rather than collecting documentary evidence of the political processes that underlie it. The context of text production and the surrounding socio-political context are reconstructed through a review of previous literature on local politics, special autonomy, and policy governance in Aceh (Andriyansyah, 2020; Maulana et al., 2018), rather than through new field data. Thus, the interpretation of these two dimensions is contextual-interpretive, literature-based, and does not claim to be an empirical reconstruction of the actual political events that occurred during the RPJMA drafting process.

Data were collected through two main techniques: documentation study and document review. Documentation study was conducted by downloading and verifying official copies of the Aceh RPJMA 2025-2029 from the Aceh Government's official channels to ensure the authenticity and completeness of the analyzed text. Document review was conducted by carefully and repeatedly reading and reviewing the contents of the document to identify relevant units of analysis, such as diction choices, sentences, and paragraphs that discuss poverty, development actors, and collaboration patterns between stakeholders. These were then grouped according to the six sections of the document that had been determined as the focus of the research.

The data analysis in this study follows Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis, which is carried out in a hierarchical and interrelated manner. The first stage is text analysis, namely a close reading of the RPJMA text to identify linguistic elements that form the representation of poverty and collaborative governance, including the choice of words (diction) used to describe poverty and the poor, metaphors and language styles used in formulating development strategies, actors who are explicitly or implicitly presented as dominant or marginalized in the text, and the form of poverty representation, whether it is constructed as an individual economic problem, a structural problem, or a collaborative governance problem. At this stage, it is also identified how collaborative governance vocabulary such as "collaboration", "partnership", "participation", or "synergy" appears and is used in the text.

The second stage is the analysis of discursive practice, which interprets the traces of the text production process that can be read from the RPJMA itself, such as sentences that appear to be the result of compromise, long lists of priorities without a clear hierarchy, or repetition of normative terms without explanation of the mechanism with the help of a literature review on the qanun legislative process and governance in Aceh, including the role of the Aceh Bappeda, the Aceh Government, and the DPRA in preparing regional planning documents (Andriyansyah, 2020; Maulana et al., 2018).

The third stage is the analysis of social practice, which connects the findings of the previous two stages with the broader socio-political context, including the power relations between actors in the formulation of poverty alleviation policies as recorded in the literature on local Acehese politics, including the role of local political parties and post-conflict executive-legislative relations, as well as the implications of the discourse construction for the design of collaborative governance in poverty alleviation policies. At this stage, the findings from Fairclough's three

dimensions are dialogued with the theoretical framework of collaborative governance (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012) and the literature on local Acehese politics, so that the final interpretation does not stop at the textual level, but is able to explain its relationship with power structures and policy governance more broadly. It should be emphasized that the interpretation in the second and third stages is a contextual interpretation based on literature review, not an empirical reconstruction of the political events that actually occurred behind the preparation of the document.

These three stages of analysis are not conducted in a linear and disconnected manner, but rather iteratively: findings at the social practice stage may prompt researchers to reread the text to discover previously unidentified linguistic markers. This iterative process is consistent with the interpretive nature of document-based qualitative research, which requires multiple readings to achieve data saturation before researchers can draw conclusions about the discourse construction of poverty, local politics, and collaborative governance in the Aceh RPJMA 2025-2029.

This study positions Fairclough's discursive and social practice dimensions as an interpretive analysis based on textual traces and contextual literature, rather than as an empirical reconstruction of the policy production process. Therefore, the primary focus of the study is on text analysis, while the other two dimensions are used to interpret the possible production contexts and social implications of the discourse constructions found.

The validity of the data in this study was established through theoretical triangulation and multiple readings, not document source triangulation, because the RPJMA was treated as the sole primary data. Theoretical triangulation was conducted by interpreting the same textual findings through more than one theoretical framework, namely Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, collaborative governance theory, and Acehese local political literature, to test whether the resulting interpretations were consistent and mutually reinforcing when read from different perspectives. Repeated readings of the RPJMA text were conducted at different times to test the consistency of the researcher's interpretations. Qualitative research trustworthiness criteria, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), served as a reference in maintaining the quality of the analysis process and results, including through recording an audit trail in the form of coding and interpretation notes at each stage of the discourse analysis, as well as peer debriefing to test the plausibility of the findings before they were included in the final research report.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Following the analysis design outlined in the methods section, the results of the reading of the Aceh RPJMA 2025–2029 are presented in a hierarchical manner, starting from the textual dimension, followed by interpretations in the discursive practice dimension, and finally, the social practice dimension. The focus of the reading is directed at how poverty is represented and positioned structurally in the document, how collaborative governance vocabulary such as “collaboration”, “partnership”, “synergy”, and “participation” appear or are absent in sections discussing poverty compared to other strategic issues, and how poverty is operationalized through indicators, targets, and development timelines contained in the document.

In the text dimension, the first prominent finding is the structural position of poverty in the document architecture. In the sub-chapter on Aceh's Strategic Issues, poverty is placed as the fourth of nine formulated issues, preceded by strengthening Islamic law and Acehese culture, improving health and overcoming stunting, and equalizing education (Government of Aceh, 2025, pp. 433–436). At the Vision, Mission, Goals, and Targets level, poverty is not even formulated as a separate mission, but only appears implicitly as part of Mission 3 (economic independence) and as a specific target in Mission 5, namely “Improving the Inclusive Social Welfare System for the Poor and Vulnerable” (Government of Aceh, 2025, p. 447). In contrast, in the Aceh Priorities sub-chapter, poverty reduction is placed third out of ten priorities, right after strengthening Islamic law and strengthening Aceh's uniqueness and exceptionalism (Government of Aceh, 2025, pp. 513–515). This recurring pattern demonstrates an implicit hierarchy in the text: issues of Aceh's political identity and uniqueness are consistently prioritized, while poverty, while acknowledged as a significant issue, is textually positioned as a subsidiary issue that follows that identity agenda.

The second finding in the text dimension relates to the uneven distribution of collaborative governance vocabulary across sections of the document. In the Aceh Strategic Issues section, the word “collaboration” appears explicitly in addressing other issues, not the poverty issue itself. On the issue of stunting reduction, the document states the need for “collaboration and synergy between local governments and various stakeholders, including international institutions, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and civil society” (Government of Aceh, 2025, p. 435). Similar vocabulary also appears on the issue of educational equality: “collaboration between the government, international institutions, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and civil society”; and on the issue of research and innovation: “encouraging collaboration between government institutions, research

institutions, universities, and private companies, coordinated by the Aceh Regional Development Planning Agency” (Government of Aceh, 2025, pp. 435–437). Conversely, in the fourth point, explicitly titled “Poverty Alleviation,” the words “collaboration” and “partnership” are not used at all.

The solutions offered are formulated through more administrative-distributive diction, namely increasing access to basic services, economic empowerment, distribution of cash and food assistance, and “improving Governance” that “involves the community in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of poverty alleviation programs” (Aceh Government, 2025, pp. 435–436). The phrase “involving the community” is dictionally more passive and generic than “collaboration” or “synergy” which explicitly mention multi-actors on other issues, thus showing an asymmetry of representation: collaborative governance is textually more strongly attached to the issues of health, education, and research-innovation, rather than to the issue of poverty itself.

Interestingly, this asymmetry is not consistent throughout the document. In the Aceh Priorities sub-chapter, specifically in section 3.10.3 on Poverty Reduction, the term collaboration appears, albeit in a more operational-institutional rather than strategic context. The document states that the Regional Poverty Reduction Coordination Team (TKPK) involves cross-regional governments and the Central Government, and that “collaboration with various stakeholders such as non-governmental organizations and academics is also carried out” (Government of Aceh, 2025, p. 516).

These differences indicate that the RPJMA document was not constructed with a single, coherent voice regarding the position of collaboration in poverty alleviation: at the level of strategic issue formulation, poverty is framed administratively without explicit collaborative vocabulary, while at the level of technical-priority description, collaboration is mentioned but is limited to formal institutional coordination mechanisms (TKPK) without an in-depth explanation of the institutional design of collaboration itself, such as dialogue mechanisms, division of authority, or participation incentives as required in the collaborative governance framework (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Such inconsistencies are in line with the character of the RPJMA as a text compiled in layers by various work units, so it is natural that it contains traces of compromise and variations in framing between parts, rather than a single, fully consistent narrative.

The third finding in the text dimension is the representation of the poor as passive beneficiaries, rather than active participants. The policy instruments mentioned in poverty alleviation are dominated by distribution schemes, such as Direct Cash Assistance (BLT), the Family Hope Program (PKH), and food aid (Government of Aceh, 2025, p. 515), as well as a strong emphasis on the accuracy of poverty data through the National Social and Economic Single Data (DTSEN) to ensure targeting accuracy. This emphasis on data and aid distribution reflects the framing of poverty as a technocratic-administrative problem resolved through data accuracy and top-down resource distribution, rather than as a problem resolved through a deliberative process with the poor as subjects.

The strengthening of this framing is also seen from the explicit reference of the document to Presidential Instruction Number 8 of 2025 concerning the Optimization of the Implementation of the Alleviation and Elimination of Extreme Poverty as the main umbrella of Aceh's poverty alleviation strategy (Aceh Government, 2025, p. 515), which shows that Aceh's poverty policy is textually positioned as the implementation of the national mandate, in contrast to the issue of Islamic law and Aceh's special status which is textually referred to in the Helsinki MoU and the UUPA as Aceh's own political achievements (Aceh Government, 2025, p. 445).

The fourth finding, which emerged after examining the table of indicators and development targets in Table 3.3 (Government of Aceh, 2025, pp. 450–461), is the fragmentation of accountability in measuring the success of poverty reduction. The document contains two indicators that are both related to poverty, but are placed under two separate targets and are not referenced to each other. First, the indicator “Poverty Level” is placed under Goal 3.2 “Improving macroeconomic stability” in Mission 3, alongside other macroeconomic indicators such as the Gini Ratio, inflation rate, and regional tax ratio, with a very ambitious target: from a range of 12.00–13.00 percent in 2025 to 5.39–6.39 percent in 2030, or almost half the starting point within a five-year period (Government of Aceh, 2025, p. 456).

Second, the “Social Welfare Index” indicator is placed below Target 5.2.2 in Mission 5, with a much more moderate and almost stagnant target: it only moves from 0.57 in 2025 to 0.584 in 2030 (Government of Aceh, 2025, p. 461). In other words, this document measures the “success” of poverty reduction through two bureaucratically separate indicator regimes without a single accountability framework that integrates them. This fragmentation is an important textual trace that shows that poverty, rather than being managed as a single cross-sectoral issue requiring integrated collaboration, is instead fragmented along existing institutional silos of planning and budgeting (economic versus social), a pattern that indirectly explains why the vocabulary of collaboration does not emerge strongly at the strategic level: there is no single “owner” of the poverty issue within the structure of this document.

The fifth finding is obtained from Table 3.4 on the Stages of Aceh Development 2026–2030 (Government of Aceh, 2025, pp. 465–467), which shows an inconsistency between the opening narrative and the details of the table itself. The opening sentence of this sub-chapter states that “the first stage of the RPJMA will be implemented in 2026, focusing on reducing poverty and creating jobs” (Government of Aceh, 2025, p. 465). However, when traced into the details of Table 3.4, the main focus of Stage I (2026) formulated as the title of the strategy is “Strengthening the implementation of Islamic Sharia, the specialness and uniqueness, and peace of Aceh” and “Improving quality infrastructure”; Poverty reduction only appears as one of the sub-points (point b) under the strategy for strengthening Islamic law and its specificity, namely “Equalizing development between districts, cities and rural areas in an effort to reduce poverty and create jobs” (Government of Aceh, 2025, p. 465). Poverty reduction only truly emerged as a stand-alone main focus title in Phase IV (2029), four years after the first phase, with detailed strategies including human resource development and adaptive social protection, accelerated housing provision for the poor, and the development of a green and blue economy (Government of Aceh, 2025, pp. 466–467). The gap between the narrative claim “the first phase focused on reducing poverty” and the actual structure of the table (poverty as a sub-point in Phase I, only becoming the main focus in Phase IV) is a textual trace that reinforces previous findings regarding the document's tendency to subordinate poverty structurally, despite its opening rhetoric stating otherwise.

The sixth finding relates to quantitative ambitions that are not balanced by adequate strategic elaboration. The target of reducing the poverty rate from 12–13 percent to 5.39–6.39 percent in five years is considered very aggressive when compared to the historical trend of Aceh's poverty, which tends to decline gradually and slowly in the previous decade. However, the elaboration of strategies to achieve this target, as outlined in Aceh Priority section 3.10.3, remains dominated by conventional social assistance instruments (BLT, PKH, food assistance) and strengthening data accuracy through DTSEN, without being accompanied by detailed explanations of new mechanisms, institutional breakthroughs, or cross-actor collaboration designs that are logically needed to achieve such a sharp decline. This gap between the ambition of the target and the depth of strategic elaboration can be read as a common characteristic of development planning discourse that tends to be rhetorically optimistic (aspirational framing), namely setting high achievement targets as a sign of political commitment, without always being accompanied by clarity of new policy instruments that are proportional to the magnitude of the ambition.

Turning to the dimension of discursive practices, the textual traces above can be interpreted with the help of a literature review on the process of legislation qanun and governance in Aceh. The RPJMA was drafted as a qanun that requires discussion and joint approval between the Aceh Government and the Aceh People's Representative Council (DPRA), a political forum historically dominated by local political parties resulting from the Helsinki MoU (Andriyansyah, 2020). The dominance of political actors whose legitimacy is rooted in Islamic identity and the uniqueness of post-conflict Aceh can be a relevant context for understanding why the issue of Islamic law and the uniqueness of Aceh consistently obtains a textual position that is prioritized over welfare issues such as poverty, both in the list of strategic issues, the list of priorities, and in the title of the focus of the first year's development stages. Meanwhile, explicit references to the Presidential Instruction and the Minister of Home Affairs Regulation in the poverty section indicate that the formulation of poverty policy in the RPJMA is heavily influenced by a national technocratic framework, not merely local political initiatives, which is consistent with the pattern of fiscal relations between Aceh and the central government that remains heavily dependent on national policy mechanisms and instruments even though this region receives a large amount of Special Autonomy Funds (Maulana et al., 2018). The fragmentation of poverty indicators between the macroeconomic and social welfare domains found in Table 3.3 can also be read as traces of the document drafting process involving many regional agencies with different main tasks and functions (Bappeda Aceh for macro planning and the Social Service for social protection) which typically work on their own technocratic paths without a strong cross-sector integration forum, resulting in two indicator regimes operating independently. It should be reiterated that the interpretation in this dimension is interpretative based on literature review and textual traces, not an empirical reconstruction of the actual negotiation process that occurred in the DPRA deliberation room or internally within Bappeda Aceh.

In the social practice dimension, the above findings can be linked to the theoretical framework of collaborative governance to understand its implications for the design of poverty alleviation policies. Ansell and Gash (2008) and Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh (2012) emphasize that effective collaborative governance requires explicit institutional design such as face-to-face dialogue forums, clear rules of the game, incentives for participation, facilitative leadership, and the capacity for integrated, cross-sectoral collective action. Viewed from this framework, the representation of collaboration in the Aceh RPJMA for poverty issues is thin, fragmented, and limited to the mention of formal institutions (TKPK) without elaboration of collaborative mechanisms, in contrast to issues of health, education, and research-innovation which textually more explicitly mention multi-actor and even appoint a collaboration coordinator (Bappeda Aceh).

This pattern can be interpreted as meaning that collaborative governance in the Aceh RPJMA is not applied as a comprehensive design principle for all development issues, but rather is applied selectively, more prominently on issues that are politically considered to require multi-stakeholder legitimacy (such as stunting and education that involve many donors and international institutions), but less prominent on the issue of poverty which historically and institutionally has had its own administrative path through the national social assistance scheme and a macroeconomic indicator path that is separate from the social welfare path.

Read through the context of Aceh's local politics outlined in the introduction, this tendency aligns with the observation that the post-conflict symbolic-identity agenda still occupies a discursive position that is prioritized over the redistributive-welfare agenda in Aceh's development planning documents. The placement of strengthening Islamic law and Aceh's uniqueness as the primary focus of Phase I of development, while poverty reduction only became the primary focus in Phase IV, can be interpreted as a textual representation of the tug-of-war between the identity politics agenda that underpins the legitimacy of local political parties post-conflict (Andriyansyah, 2020) and the more technocratic welfare agenda oriented toward fulfilling national policy mandates. Similarly, the fragmentation of poverty indicators between the ambitious macroeconomic realm and the stagnant social welfare realm can be read as a reflection of Aceh's fiscal relations pattern, which, despite having ample fiscal space through the Special Autonomy Fund, still faces challenges in ensuring that these fiscal transfer instruments are effectively integrated for cross-sectoral poverty alleviation (Maulana et al., 2018). This reading is once again not intended to claim that the textual patterns reflect the actual preferences of all political actors involved in the drafting of the RPJMA, but rather as an interpretation of the possible socio-political meanings behind the textual traces that have been identified.

The seventh finding is obtained from Table 3.5 of the Priority Program Formulation (Government of Aceh, 2025, pp. 495-496), which contains details of the programs under Target 5.2.2. One of the indicators used is “Percentage of Poor and Vulnerable Families Receiving Social Protection Who Graduated from Poverty” under the Social Protection and Security Program. The use of the term “graduation,” a technical term commonly used in national social protection policy discourse to mark the exit of a family from the status of aid recipient, indicates that poverty in the RPJMA is constructed as an administrative condition whose status can be measured through program participant databases, rather than as a problem whose solution involves a deliberative process or representation of the voices of the poor themselves. The term “graduated” is in line with previous findings regarding the emphasis on data accuracy (DTSEN) and conventional aid schemes, while also emphasizing that the overall architecture of poverty representation in this document tends towards technocratic-managerial logic rather than collaborative-participatory logic which is the core of collaborative governance.

The findings in this text dimension have both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, this study demonstrates that the application of collaborative governance in a regional development planning document cannot be assumed to apply equally to all policy issues simply because the framework is mentioned or practiced on some other issues in the same document. In line with the argument of Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh (2012) that the success of collaborative governance depends heavily on the explicit design of the collaborative governance regime, this study shows that the absence of an explicit collaborative institutional design for the issue of poverty (compared to health, education, or research-innovation issues in the same document) can be an early indicator of the weakness of the collaborative foundation of the policy before the implementation stage.

Practically, the findings regarding the fragmentation of poverty indicators between the macroeconomic and social welfare domains suggest the need for Aceh policymakers to consider strengthening the integration forum across Aceh's Work Units (Bappeda, the Social Service, and the Aceh TKPK) in the next planning cycle, so that ambitious quantitative targets in the macroeconomic domain are truly supported by an integrated social protection and empowerment program design, rather than running along two separate bureaucratic paths. This implication is consistent with the findings of collaborative governance studies in various regions in Indonesia, which show that the effectiveness of poverty alleviation is largely determined by the extent to which cross-sector collaboration is substantively designed, rather than merely normatively mentioned in planning documents (Pratama, 2023; Sadayi et al., 2022; Taqiyah, 2024).

Overall, the results of this critical discourse analysis indicate that the poverty alleviation policy in the Aceh RPJMA 2025-2029 is textually constructed through several intertwined tendencies: first, poverty is structurally positioned following the agenda of Aceh's identity and specificity, both in the order of strategic issues, priority order, and in the phasing of development time; second, poverty is framed administratively-technocratically as the implementation of national policy mandates, with collaborative governance elements that are thinly and unevenly present compared to other development issues in the same document; and third, accountability for the success of poverty alleviation is fragmented into two separate indicator regimes, one ambitious in the macroeconomic realm,

the other stagnant in the social welfare realm without a clear cross-sectoral integration framework. These findings form the basis for conclusions regarding their implications for the effectiveness of Aceh's poverty alleviation policy, while also reaffirming that all of the above interpretations are interpretations of the RPJMA text construction, not claims about the reality of the political process and collaboration that actually takes place on the ground.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the poverty alleviation policy in the Aceh RPJMA 2025-2029 is not constructed as a stand-alone agenda and equal to other development issues, but rather as an issue that structurally follows the agenda of Aceh's identity and uniqueness, and is framed administratively-technocratically rather than collaboratively-participatory. The spirit of collaborative governance that appears strong in the handling of health, education, and research-innovation issues in the same document, is not reflected equally in the formulation of the poverty alleviation strategy, which is instead measured through two separate and unintegrated accountability channels.

These findings confirm that the presence of a collaborative governance framework in a development planning document cannot be assumed to apply uniformly to all policy issues, and that a careful reading of the policy text can reveal a gap between the rhetoric of planning and the depth of its institutional design. Thus, this research helps fill a gap in research that has previously separated the study of poverty, local politics, and collaborative governance in Aceh as separate fields.

These conclusions are the result of an interpretation of the RPJMA text as the sole source of data, not an empirical reconstruction of the actual political and collaborative processes taking place on the ground. Future research could deepen these findings through approaches involving field data, such as interviews with policymakers or post-qanun implementation studies, to examine the extent to which the discourse constructions identified here are actually manifested in practice. Practically, these findings can provide input for the Aceh Government to strengthen integration across regional agencies in designing more collaborative poverty alleviation policies in the next planning cycle.

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