

## Poverty Alleviation as a Social Welfare Policy: Implementation of the Saraswati Program for the Benefit of Society

Shinta Tris Irawati<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>) University of Indonesia, Indonesia

\* Correspondence e-mail: shinta.tris@ui.ac.id

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### Abstract

Sragen Regency has the highest percentage of poor people in Solo Raya. Despite the highest percentage of poor people, efforts to accelerate poverty reduction are in the second highest place in Solo Raya. These efforts are carried out by implementing poverty alleviation policies through the Saraswati Program. The focus of the research is to analyze the implementation of the poverty alleviation policy of the Saraswati Program as a social welfare policy and its beneficial elements for policy recipients. The research approach is qualitative. Interviews were conducted with 12 informants through purposive sampling techniques. The results of the study show that poverty alleviation of the Saraswati Program through the perspective of social welfare policy in the basic aspect of policy has applied the concept of selectivity, the aspect of the type of policy is carried out through the provision of direct services, the aspect of the funding system is carried out by utilizing the APBD, and the distribution aspect is carried out directly to the beneficiaries. Poverty alleviation policies bring benefits in providing social welfare services. Still, there is not yet a full monitoring process in the implementation process, so it is expected that it is necessary to carry out these stages to get a more effective benefit impact.

### Keywords

Benefits: Poverty Alleviation, Saraswati Program, Social Welfare Policy.



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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The problem of poverty has become one of the world's concerns by making it the first sustainable development target or SDGs Goal 1. No poverty. The World Bank (2025) states that poverty is multidimensional, where an individual who experiences poverty experiences an inability to meet basic needs. Still, poverty can also mean inadequate access to health, education, sanitation, nutrition, and infrastructure. Based World Bank Group (2024) on its report *Poverty, Prosperity, and Planet Report 2024: Pathways Out of The Polycrisis* states that global poverty reduction has slowed to almost a halt, the first global poverty figures for the post-Covid-19 pandemic period in 2024 show that around 8.5% of the global population lives in extreme poverty.

Poverty is still a big challenge in various countries, including Indonesia. The percentage of poor people in Indonesia in March 2024 was 9.03%, which decreased compared to March 2023, where the number of poor people in Indonesia until March 2024 reached 25.22 million (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2024b). The ratio of the number of poor people in Indonesia did not change significantly in 2023 compared to the previous year. Still, the ratio of the number of poor people remained around 9.4% (O'Neill, 2024). Meanwhile, the percentage of poor people in Central Java Province in 2024 shows that the number of poor people is 3,705 million people (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2024a)

Sragen Regency, according to the number of poor people, has 115 thousand people with a percentage of 12.87%; besides that, Sragen Regency occupies the highest percentage of poor people in Solo Raya. Although the percentage of poor people is the highest, the acceleration of poverty reduction in Sragen Regency is in the second highest place after the city of Surakarta. Central Statistics Agency of Sragen Regency (2024b). Sragen Regency, with the highest percentage of poor people in Solo Raya according to the Central Statistics Agency of Sragen Regency (2024), seeks to alleviate poverty by issuing poverty alleviation policies that are poured into Regulation of the Regent of Sragen Regency Number 2 of 2012 concerning the Establishment of Unit Terpadu Penanggulangan Kemiskinan (UPTPK) in Sragen Regency. The policy UPTPK is outlined through the Saraswati Program (Sarase Warga Sukowati). The Sarawati program is issued in the form of a card. This card is intended as the identity of underprivileged residents in Sragen Regency, which can be used to get services in the fields of education, health, and assistance in the implementation of Simple Houses Decent and Safe for Sukowati Residents (Rumah Sederhana Layak Aman Warga Sukowati-Ruselawati).

Regent Regulation Number 2 of 2012 shows that the target beneficiaries of the Saraswati Program are the people of Sragen Regency who are classified as poor people. Based on the regulation, the beneficiaries are categorized into Saraswati Melati, Saraswati Menur, and Saraswati Kenanga. Saraswati Melati is given to people experiencing poverty in Sragen Regency based on the Integrated Database (Basis Data Terpadu/BDT). The category of Saraswati Menur recipients is based on the results of a survey that the UTPK has conducted.

Despite various efforts, poverty alleviation remains a top national and global development priority. The government is committed to realizing the targets of the SDGs related to ending poverty, one of the crucial steps in achieving this condition by implementing various poverty alleviation and poverty alleviation programs (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2024b).

According to the Central Statistics Agency of Sragen Regency (2024a), Karangmalang District has a population of 73,838 people, consisting of 10 villages/villages including Kedungwaduk, Jurangjero, Saradan, Plosokerep, Guworejo, Puro, Mojorejo, Pelemgadung, Kroyo, and Plumbungan. Meanwhile, Plumbungan Village has the third largest population with 9,741 people. Based on the Statistics Center of Sragen Regency (2024a) 2024, the poverty rate in Karangmalang District will be 11,130 people. Reported in Solopos.com stated that three sub-districts in Sragen Regency are targeted by the 2024 Poverty Completion Village Program (Desa Tuntas Kemiskinan/ Desa Tumis), one of which is Karangmalang District (Rahayu, 2024).

Plumbungan Village has the third largest population in Karangmalang District, with 9,741 people. Meanwhile, the number of poor people in Plumbungan Village is 835. However, based on the Sragen Regency Poverty Alleviation Management Information System, the beneficiaries of the Saraswati Program are 258 families with 759 people. This condition occurs because poor people in Plumbungan Village have still not been recorded in the Integrated Database (BDT) or survey results from the UTPK.

The Saraswati program is an innovation from the local government to optimize services based on pro poor by providing services for issuing Saraswati cards, providing health services through referrals for regional health insurance, referral recommendations for providing educational scholarships, providing uninhabitable houses, providing poor rice assistance, providing wheelchair assistance for people with disabilities, and free ambulances ( Sutikno & Pribadi, 2023). In implementing the Saraswati program policy, there has been no monitoring related to running the

program. In addition, there are still program recipients who are not on target. Integrated services in poverty alleviation are a form of effort so that people experiencing poverty can more quickly obtain public services from the government (Sutikno & Pribadi, 2023).

Poverty is a condition of incapable individuals, based on the economic side, to meet their living needs, both food and non-food needs, which are measured based on the individual's spending side, with average per capita expenditure per month below the poverty line (Central Statistics Agency, 2024a). Zastrow (2010) said there are two approaches to defining poverty: absolute and relative. Absolute poverty is defined as the condition of an individual unable to meet their minimum needs. In contrast, relative poverty is seen as a condition of a person when their income is much lower than the population's average income. In line with this opinion, Statista Research Department (2025) states that poverty can be measured as relative and absolute. Absolute poverty is related to the basic needs of individuals, such as clothing, food, board (shelter), and clean drinking water. Meanwhile, relative poverty looks at whether individuals in various countries can meet a certain standard of living.

Previous research used as a reference material in this study refers to the theme of poverty alleviation, social welfare policy, the theme of program usefulness, and the theme of the Saraswati Program. Previous research related to the theme of poverty alleviation, one of which has been researched by Sinurat (2023) related to poverty alleviation, emphasizes more on the analysis of the factors that cause poverty as an effort to alleviate poverty, the results of this study show that the poverty rate is influenced by unemployment, the Human Development Index, and inflation. Other research on poverty alleviation was also carried out on implementing policies based on national and provincial laws and local district regulations (Anas et al., 2024). Another research conducted by emphasizing the level of effectiveness of poverty alleviation programs in this case is the Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH), which is seen through indicators of target accuracy, socialization, knowledge, and accuracy of goals (Aldiansyah et al., 2024)

Research related to the thematic of social welfare policy has been researched by Akbar & Prayoga (2022) with a focus on research measuring the direction of social welfare policy through the implementation program of the Social Rehabilitation Assistance Program (ATENSI) in the elderly sector, the results of the research illustrate the policy direction of the program by guaranteeing the basic rights of service needs, strengthening the social rehabilitation system to the principles of holistic service. In addition, the research conducted by Sari et al. (2022) emphasizes the implementation

of social welfare policies in fulfilling accessibility for people with disabilities in social adaptation. Previous research related to the implementation of the Saraswati Program has been conducted by Sutikno & Pribadi (2023) those who discuss the implementation of the Saraswati program with a public administration instrument approach. Meanwhile, the research results conducted by Rohmah (2016) discussed the implementation of UTPK services through the Saraswati program based on a bureaucratic management approach based on creativity, justice, plurality, needs-based, and responsiveness in building public service management. Previous research conducted by Jayanti & Djumiarti (2020) the Saraswati program assessed that related to satisfaction of the Saraswati program recipients in accessing health services, by being reviewed through the service quality dimension. The study results showed that the Saraswati program's implementation was classified as satisfactory.

Based on the results of previous research, there are research gaps that can be further researched related to the theme of poverty alleviation through a social welfare policy approach to the Saraswati program. The research gap reflected in this study is that research discusses poverty alleviation policies. Still, no research has placed poverty alleviation policies from the perspective of social welfare policies. In addition, many studies have discussed the Saraswati Program for people experiencing poverty in Sragen Regency. Still, no research has comprehensively examined implementing poverty alleviation policies through the Saraswati Program with a social welfare policy approach. This study tries to describe the implementation of poverty alleviation policies through the Saraswati Program based on the perspective of social welfare policies and their benefits for beneficiaries.

## **2. METHODS**

The approach in this study uses a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach is used to obtain in-depth and accurate data according to the conditions that occur in the field (Neuman, 2014). According to Rubin & Babbie (2011), qualitative research aims to gain a deep meaning to the factual experience of human behavior. Viewed based on data collection and data analysis techniques, qualitative research emphasizes understanding. This research raises the concept of implementing social welfare policies in the Saraswati Program and its benefits for beneficiaries. So that in this study will describe the data in depth related to the implementation of social welfare policies, the Saraswati Program, and its usefulness in poverty alleviation. Based on the purpose of the research, this study is descriptive. Neuman's (2014) descriptive research aims to describe research with words or numbers, classification of types, profiles, and certain stages to answer research questions in the context of who, when, where, and how.

Using a descriptive type of research, this study has systematically, in detail, and in-depth examined the implementation of social welfare policies to alleviate poverty. Based on the benefits or audience for and use of research, this research is oriented to academia and science, often called pure research or basic research (Neuman, 2014).

The research was conducted in Plumbungan Village, Karangmalang District, Sragen Regency. The selection of informants in this study used purposive sampling techniques. Neuman (2014) stated that the sampling process is non-random based on certain criteria and uses various methods. Purposive sampling is part of non-probability sampling, where researchers use various methods to find possible phenomena taken from specific and hard-to-reach population numbers (Neuman, 2014). Explain the characteristics of Alston & Bowles (2003), the purposive sampling technique, namely in the research of samples that are selected for a specific purpose and can provide insight into social phenomena related to a field of study, as well as the number of samples determined by the research topic and availability. Through the purposive sampling technique in this study, the steps to determine informants based on certain criteria that the researcher has determined according to the needs are as follows: 1). They are the parties involved in implementing the Saraswati Program policy; 2). They are the parties who benefit from the Sarawati Program in Plumbungan Village. Based on the criteria of informants, in this study, 12 informants are considered important actors in the research.

Field data was collected using several qualitative research techniques, such as documentation studies, observations, and in-depth interviews. (Bryman, 2012) explaining that qualitative research must emphasize the preference to research a study as something needed to analyze the data. The documentation study was carried out by seeking information from the World Bank, the World Wide Web, or the United Nations, to data reports on the implementation of the Saraswati Program. Observation is carried out by observing behavior and phenomena by providing a distance between the observer and the studied object. In this case, it is carried out on the research object by looking at the activities of the Sragen Regency government and the beneficiaries of the Sarawati Program in Plumbungan Village. The researcher took field notes regarding the behavior and activity of the objects in the study (Cresswell, 2009). In-depth interviews are conducted by giving semi-structured questions and unstructured interviews.

The data analysis used in this study begins by preparing and collecting data in text, such as interview transcripts, then reducing the data through the process of making code, and finally by presenting data (Cresswell, 2009). Data analysis by coding

in this study was carried out through three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Qualitative research quality can be improved with transferability, dependability, credibility, and confirmability (Krefting, 1991). In this study, the credibility stage is carried out through triangulation. Triangulation is a form of data confirmation by ensuring that all aspects of the research have been investigated through assessment, cross-examination, and interpretation of data.

### **3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The implementation of poverty alleviation policies through the Saraswati Program is based on the perspective of social welfare policies and their benefits for beneficiaries based on field findings and data analysis show several aspects of the findings.

#### **3.1. *Social Welfare Policy in Poverty Alleviation, Saraswati Program***

The implementation of poverty alleviation policies for the poor as a social welfare policy in this study relates to basic policy aspects, types of policies, funding systems, and distribution systems.

##### **Basis of Policy**

From the perspective of social welfare policy, the basis is related to feasibility rules in determining the targets of the Saraswati program. The Saraswati program is generally intended for underprivileged people in Sragen Regency, which is based on the National Socio-Economic Single Database (Data Tunggal Sosial Ekonomi Nasional/DTSEN) owned by the Ministry of Social Affairs and survey results from the UTPK. The information was conveyed by Informant A, who said that.

"If the implementation of this program is carried out, the people who receive it are underprivileged in the Sragen Regency area, whose data is of two types, the first is from the integrated database from the Ministry of Social Affairs, now it is called the National Socio-Economic Single Data. The second is the data from the survey results by our officers directly visiting the underprivileged" (Saraswati Program Manager).

In line with the information above, informant B, as the beneficiary of the Saraswati Program, also explained the following:

Yesterday, from the district (UTPK), someone came to the house to check the condition of the house, yes, check it starting from the front yard to enter the house, see the bathroom too, and the rooms too. We are also asked about our income, how many dependents do we have children" (Saraswati Program Beneficiaries).

The eligibility of beneficiaries of the Saraswati Program is categorized into three clusters, namely Saraswati Melati, Saraswati Menur, and Saraswati Kenanga. The results of the interview from one of the informants, C, as the beneficiary of the Saraswati Menur category, said that:

"I got this program, which is a Menur class. In the early days, before I got this assistance, there were districts that came to my house to survey my residence" (Saraswati Program Beneficiaries).

The findings in the field show that the eligibility rules for Saraswati Program recipients are poor people based on the Ministry of Social Affairs' National Socio-Economic Single Data, which he used to call the Integrated Database. Beneficiaries are also based on the results of a survey of the residence of prospective program recipients. The Regent Regulation of Sragen Regency Number 2 of 2012 states the eligibility rules regarding establishing a Unit Pelayanan Terpadu Penanggulangan Kemiskinan (UPTPK) in Sragen Regency. The policy basis implemented by the organizers of the Saraswati Program is quite relevant to the basic policy aspect of social welfare policy theory, namely determining the feasibility of policy recipients through a selectivity approach by emphasizing that the provision of social policies must be limited to the beneficiaries who are the main targets. Also mentioned, Gilbert & Terrell (2013), the basic elements of a policy regulate the eligibility of beneficiaries of the policy. Determining the suitability of policy recipients through two approaches, namely the universal approach and the selectivity approach. In implementing this policy, the assumption is that the provision of social policies must be limited only to beneficiaries who are the main targets, so that if the state is present to alleviate poverty, the programs determined will focus on poor groups.

### **Design or Type of Policy**

Poverty alleviation policies are implemented by providing assistance, both in cash and free services such as health services and services to provide livable, healthy houses. This is in line with the information submitted by the beneficiaries as follows:

"Yes, we get free assistance to get treatment at the health center or hospitals that receive services, such as regional hospitals. But some neighbors are given scholarship money because their children are in college" (Saraswati Program Beneficiary).

The provision of assistance is directly applied to beneficiaries who are declared eligible. The findings show that the type of policy implemented through the provision of services directly is in the form of cash and health services. This is relevant to the



theory of social welfare policy, namely, the type of social policy is classified into several categories of social provisions, one of which is in the form of services and cash.

### **Funding System**

The social welfare policy funding system is one of the important concerns for policymakers and planners. The source of funding from the poverty alleviation policy of the Saraswati Program is regulated in the regulations of the Sragen Regency Government. This was conveyed by Informant A, who said that:

"The source of funding from the Sragen Regency Budget has indeed been budgeted for poverty alleviation programs in Sragen Regency itself. Yes, the existing funds are used to provide services for the underprivileged" (Saraswati Program Manager).

The findings in the field show that implementing social welfare policies for poverty alleviation through the Saraswati Program is funded from the APBD. The source of funds is expected to be able to encourage the realization of the Saraswati Program sustainably. This is relevant to the theory of Gilbert & Terrell's (2013), which states that one of the sources of funding in social welfare policies comes from government funding. Available funding is responsible for maintaining the necessary resources while providing poverty alleviation services for underprivileged communities.

The funding system carried out in implementing poverty alleviation policies through the Saraswati Program is relevant to the social welfare policy funding system theory, which is a legitimate social protection instrument to be used by developing countries as long as the budget is still available.

### **Distribution System**

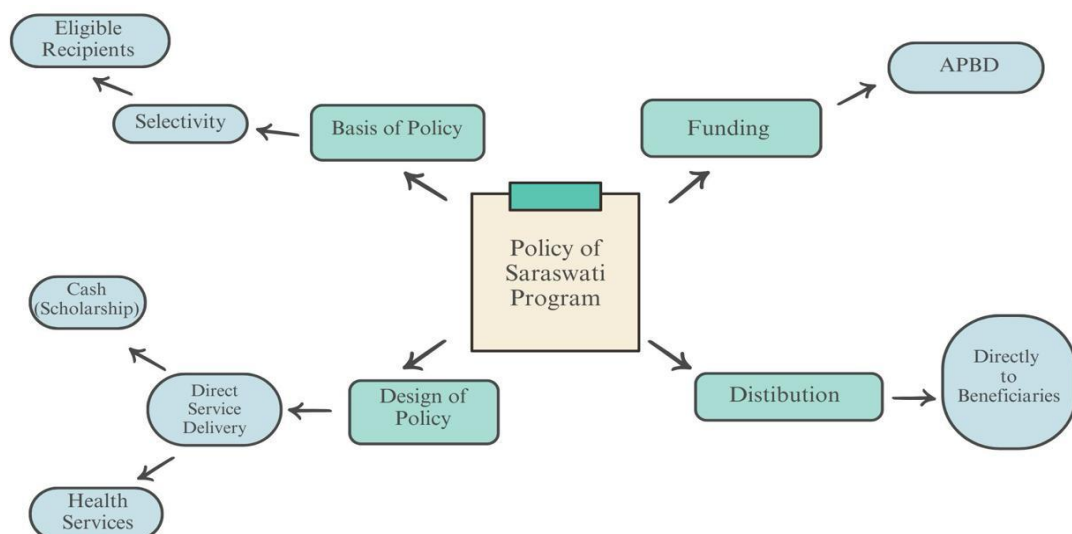
The distribution system of the Saraswati Program is based on the organizational arrangement between the program provider and the recipient. The distribution mechanism of this program is carried out by using the Saraswati Card as a card to designate poor people who are entitled to receive services from the Sragen Regency government. This was confirmed by Informant D as the recipient of the following benefits:

"At that time, I was given a card like that. In the past, the card was waiting for my house, Mr. RT It was said that if I got a Saraswati card from the Regency. This is the card I keep; if you take it for treatment, you can get free treatment. If you have a student who is in college, you can apply for a scholarship. You can get a scholarship" (Saraswati Program Beneficiary).

Findings in the field show that the distribution system of poverty alleviation policies through the Saraswati Program is carried out directly by providing special cards as a beneficiary designator. The cardholder can directly receive integrated services ranging from health services, providing scholarship assistance for their children who continue their education in college, to getting livable, healthy housing assistance from Sragen Regency. The results of the field findings show that there is an ideal relationship with the theory of the distribution system in social welfare policy, which states that social welfare policy is categorized as ideal if the authority can provide services with integrity, accountability, sustainability, and easy access for its beneficiaries.

The distribution of services of the Saraswati Program is quite relevant to Gilbert & Terrell's theory related to social welfare policy which emphasizes that the policy distribution system refers to the arrangement of the relevant organization as a service provider, in this case the Integrated Service Unit for Poverty Alleviation (Unit Pelayanan Terpadu Penanggulangan Kemiskinan/UPTPK) to be provided to consumers, in this case the underprivileged community who has been recorded as beneficiaries.

The Saraswati Program policy for the underprivileged in Plumbungan Village is one of the products used as a guideline and rules for expanding services for the community. Based on the facts, field findings, and analysis, it is clear that the theory of social welfare policy has not been fully seen in the implementation of the poverty alleviation policy of the Saraswati Program in Plumbungan Village. However, within the framework of social welfare policy parameters, it can be seen that each aspect of the implementation of the Saraswati Program is interrelated and sustainable.



**Figure 1.** Flow Scheme of Social Welfare Policy Aspects in the Saraswati Program

The scheme of the linkage flow in the aspect of social welfare policy in the Saraswati Program shows how each aspect of policy corresponds to other choices, such as the application of selectivism in the basic aspect of policy which has a significant influence on the aspect of choosing the type of policy taken, namely the provision of services directly, as well as this condition has implications for the selection of aspects of the policy distribution mechanism that It is carried out openly and aspects of the funding system are carried out through the regional budget with a transfer system and free service provision.

### ***3. 2. Benefits of the Saraswati Program for Beneficiaries***

The Saraswati program for people experiencing poverty, especially in Plumbungan Village, has the benefit of providing social welfare services, the services in question include the provision of free health services, scholarships for students from beneficiary families, to healthy house surgery services that are safe and livable for Sukowati residents. The DK informant, one of the beneficiaries of the Saraswati Program, mentioned the following:

"Alhamdulillah, for us with the help of Saraswati this is very helpful, yesterday when our child got typhoid we went directly to the health center and was immediately handled by the same party who was referred to Sragen Hospital and immediately handled it as well, thank God it was free" (DK Informant, Beneficiary).

In line with this information, informants from the same perspective as beneficiaries also conveyed that:

"My first child yesterday got an education scholarship from the Regency, if this fund is a scholarship given 6 million per month, if my son says that the funds are given to change the semester, it's not quite right, thank God, it can be used to pay for the semester, buy books too" (BL Informant, Beneficiary).

Based on the findings in the field, it is stated that the benefits obtained by the beneficiaries provide more convenience for the community in getting free services, so that it can provide convenience for the community to meet their basic needs. This is quite relevant to the theory of poverty, which states that poverty is not only limited to the inability of individuals to meet basic needs but also includes the helplessness of individuals in accessing health services and education.

The usefulness felt by the beneficiaries of the Saraswati Program in poverty alleviation efforts is quite relevant to the theory Davis's (1989) that the usefulness is one of the indicators or benchmarks for the use of services, goods, and services that are believed to be able to bring benefits to individuals who use them. Although it is

undeniable that the sense of usefulness is one of the subjective abilities, the usefulness of the Saraswati Program for its users can increase the social functioning of individuals, specifically, in this case, the beneficiaries can meet their basic needs properly.

Based on the type of benefit, the implementation of the Saraswati Program is quite relevant to the theory of Choliq et al. (1999) that this program is classified as a type of tangible benefit, which means that the benefits of the Saraswati Program can be felt directly and are tangible.

The benefits that the beneficiaries feel can give rise to a sense of protection for the recipients. This condition is quite relevant to the theory of White et al. (2016), where social protection can arise through the provision of social services intended for individuals in dealing with social vulnerabilities in the community. This condition is also relevant to the theory that social protection for the community is part of a social policy deliberately designed to create security conditions and ease for the community to access social services. International Labour Organization (2012)

Furthermore, the implementation of social policies through the Saraswati Program that the Sragen Regency Government has implemented is quite relevant to the theory conveyed by the International Labour Organization (2012) the one which explains that one form of social protection includes ensuring universal access to basic services and can be easily affordable for the underprivileged.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The policy designed by the Sragen Regency Government is a form of intervention to address problems that arise in the community. Social welfare policy is a guideline for the government to meet basic needs to achieve social welfare goals. The implementation of the Saraswati Program policy implemented in Plumbungan Village based on the results of field findings shows that the policy basis in the implementation of the Saraswati Program as a social welfare policy adheres to the concept of selectivity, namely by enforcing the eligibility of policy recipients so that restrictions are made for beneficiaries who are the main targets. The type of policy applied in implementing the Saraswati Program policy for people experiencing poverty in Plumbungan Village falls into the category of direct services through the provision of services to the provision of cash. The funding system for the implementation of the Saraswati Program uses funding from the Sragen Regency Regional Budget, which has previously been regulated through the preparation and discussion of the Regional Budget. Meanwhile, the program policy distribution system is carried out using the Saraswati Card, which functions as an identification card for poor people entitled to

receive services.

The Saraswati Program policy for beneficiaries as one of the vulnerable groups has provided benefits in providing social welfare services, including free health services, scholarships for students, and healthy home surgery services that are safe to live in. The Saraswati program, as a social welfare policy in its implementation, has not been fully monitored for the implementation of poverty alleviation in Plumbungan Village, so that the beneficiaries view that the program organizers rarely monitor, especially in the provision of health services and healthy house surgical services that are safe to live in. So, based on this research, there are recommendations for the organizers of the Saraswati Program. To carry out social welfare policies, it is necessary to carry out a periodic monitoring process for beneficiaries to impact them effectively.

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