

# Do Public–Social Partnerships Work? Assessing the Effectiveness of Child Marriage Prevention Policy

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze and describe the effectiveness of public social partnerships in preventing child marriage in Maros Regency. This study is based on the implementation of the 2021–2026 Strategy for Child Marriage Prevention in Maros Regency and the involvement of various actors such as the DP3A, ICJ, the Children's Forum, and the Religious Courts as strategic partners. The research method used is qualitative research with a phenomenological research design. Data collection techniques in this study utilize observation, interviews, and documentation to obtain a comprehensive picture or information related to the problem studied. The results show that public social partnerships in preventing child marriage in Maros Regency have been effective, as evidenced by the decline in the number of marriage dispensations each year. The commitment dimension is deemed effective through the consistency of roles, responsibilities, and sustainability of the program implemented by all parties. The coordination dimension is also effective, indicated by regular communication, both through direct and indirect meetings (online media). Trust between partners is strongly formed through confidence in the capacity and integrity of each actor, thus supporting harmonious collaboration. Partner participation is also very effective through active involvement in planning, decision-making, and field actions that show tangible results. Meanwhile, joint problem solving has been effective, although not optimal due to external obstacles in the form of cultural norms, traditional mindsets, and low public acceptance of prevention efforts.

**Keywords:** *Public Social Partnership, Child Marriage, Effectiveness, Partnership*

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## INTRODUCTION

Child marriage remains a worrying issue for many countries around the world. According to UNICEF & UNFPA (2017), global concern about the practice of child marriage arises because it is considered a violation of children's basic rights, limits their freedom and opportunities to develop, and increases the risk of children experiencing violence, exploitation, and abuse. According to the Director of People's Welfare Statistics at the Statistics Indonesia (BPS) (2019), if the number of child marriages remains high, several other SDGs will be difficult to achieve. The SDGs that will be affected are: the goals of no poverty, no hunger, healthy and prosperous lives, quality education, gender equality, decent work and economic growth, reduced inequality, and peace, justice, and strong institutions. In fact, according to Sari & Aulia (2024), child marriage has the potential to have a more dominant negative impact than its positive impact, so a joint effort is needed to overcome it.

Normatively, the prevention of child marriage has been outlined in various policies and regulations such as Law Number 35 of 2014 concerning Child Protection, which clearly regulates the obligations of parents to protect and prohibit marriage for their children who are not yet old enough. This is further regulated in Law Number 16 of

2019 regarding the minimum age limit for child marriage. In addition, the state's commitment to preventing child marriage is also a concern, where this is evidenced by making this a strategic issue in the 2020-2024 RPJMN, where the Indonesian government set a target to change the prevalence of child marriage from 11.2 percent in 2018 to 8.74 percent in 2024. This commitment in the RPJMN is also strengthened by the preparation of the National Strategy for the Prevention of Child Marriage.

To achieve this target, the Regional Government, which is also a pioneer in strengthening child marriage prevention, is certainly playing a role in supporting child marriage prevention efforts. One area that is also focused on child marriage prevention is Maros Regency, South Sulawesi Province. To achieve this target, the Regional Government, which is also a pioneer in strengthening child marriage prevention, is certainly playing a role in supporting child marriage prevention efforts. This is demonstrated by the policy of Maros Regent Regulation Number 74 of 2021 concerning the Regional Strategy for Child Marriage Prevention in Maros Regency for 2021-2026. This regulation serves as a guideline for all parties responsible for implementing child protection measures to prevent child marriage in Maros Regency. In this Regent Regulation, the Maros Regency Government set a target of

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reducing the percentage of child marriage practices in Maros Regency to 4% by 2026. This target aligns with SDG target 5.3, namely, eliminating all harmful practices, such as child marriage, early and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation.

**Table 1.** Target Percentage of Child Marriage Practices in Maros Regency 2021-2026

Year	Target (%)
2022	Decrease until 10%
2023	Decrease until 8%
2024	Decrease until 6%
2025	Decrease until 5%
2026	Decrease until 4%

*Source:* Maros Regency STRADA Document (2025)

Efforts to achieve the Maros Regency Child Marriage Prevention Strategy (STADA) target cannot be undertaken alone by the government; they require collaboration between various parties, one of which is through partnerships. As Osborne (2010) explains, one effective way to involve other sectors in governance is through partnerships. In this context, partnerships are understood as cooperation between two or more entities or individuals to achieve a common goal. Therefore, partnerships are fundamentally necessary for the government to carry out its role, particularly in preventing child marriage, by involving various actors.

In light of recent developments, a new partnership model has emerged that is considered effective in addressing social problems: the Public Social Partnership (PSP) model. This model emphasizes collaboration between the public sector (government) and the social sector to address specific social issues. Unlike Public Private Partnerships (PPPs), which focus on financial returns from infrastructure investments (return on investment), Public Social Partnerships (PSPs) require the government to offer returns in the form of potential social impact. This social impact is a key motivator for social sector organizations to think creatively and innovatively in designing programs or solutions relevant to community needs.

In the context of preventing child marriage in Maros Regency, the Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, Population Control and Family Planning Agency (DP3A-DADLUK KB) as the leading sector in preventing child marriage in Maros Regency has partnered with the Public Social Partnership (PSP) model. This is supported by the formation of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with non-governmental parties (social sector) engaged in the protection of women and children, one of which is the Institute of Community Justice (ICJ) of Makassar City. The MOU number between DP3A-DADLUK KB of Maros Regency and ICJ is 130.3/32/DP3A-DADLUK KB/XI/2022. The scope of this cooperation agreement includes, among other things, mediation/assistance to prevent child marriage. In the cooperation agreement, DP3A-DADLUK KB is obliged to tighten the issuance of marriage dispensation recommendations to suppress the occurrence of child marriage. The ICJ is obliged to support

all forms of innovation developed by the DP3A-DADLUK KB of Maros Regency related to the fulfillment of the rights and protection of women and children.

In addition, DP3A-DADLUK KB Maros Regency also collaborates with the Class 1B Religious Court, where this collaboration aims to enable the Religious Court to postpone and limit the issuance of marriage dispensation application letters, especially for children under 19 years old. The Maros Regency Regional Government also formed the Maros Regency Children's Forum named the Maros Regency Butta Salewangan Children's Forum with one of its main duties, namely to socialize all forms of fulfillment of children's rights and protection, including the prevention of child marriage to all children and all relevant stakeholders in Maros Regency.

## METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach, focusing on analyzing Analysis of the implementation of public social partnerships in preventing child marriage in Maros Regency. The research design used is a case study. In the analysis process, researchers used the theory of effective partnerships within the framework of public social partnerships by Mohr and Spekman (1994) which contains 4 indicators, namely commitment, coordination, trust, participation, and problem solving.

Data collection was conducted through observations and interviews with several informants. The informants for this research were determined based on the purposive sampling method, including the Head of the Child Protection Section of the Women and Children's Empowerment Service of Maros Regency, the Director of the Institute of Community Justice (ICJ) of Makassar City, the Coordinator of the Butta Salewangang Children's Forum of Maros Regency, and the Judge of the Maros Religious Court Class 1 B. In addition, the researcher also collected various documents, including research results and other relevant documents, to enrich the analysis. The collected data were then analyzed using data analysis techniques proposed by Creswell (2018): Organizing and Preparing Data, Reading Through All Data, Coding the Data, and Interpreting the Meaning of Themes/Descriptions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The partnership between the Maros Regency Government, through the DP3A-DADLUK KB (Family Planning and Family Planning Agency), and the social sector is a form of Public Social Partnership (PSP) implementation aimed at achieving the target of reducing child marriage rates, as stipulated in the STRADA policy plan for Child Marriage Prevention in Maros Regency for 2021–2026. This partnership arose from the realization that the problem of child marriage cannot be addressed solely through government intervention but requires collaboration across actors.

The effectiveness of the PSP in Maros Regency can be seen in the concrete achievements of the year-over-year decline in child marriage rates. Data from the Maros Regency Religious Court shows a drastic decline in the

number of marriage dispensation applications over the past five years, from 237 applications in 2020 to only 4 applications in 2024.

**Table 2.** Data on Marriage Dispensation Cases at the Maros Religious Court in 2020–2024

Year	Submission	Granted
2020	237	207
2021	188	152
2022	71	57
2023	16	9
2024	4	3

*Source:* Maros Regency Religious Court (2025)

Based on Table 3, the number of marriage dispensation applications in Maros Regency experienced a sharp decline, from 188 in 2021 to 71 in 2022. This downward trend continued consistently through 2023, with only 16 applications, and then dropped drastically again in 2024, with four applications. A similar trend was also seen in the number of granted applications, which decreased from 152 in 2021 to 57 in 2022, nine in 2023, and only three in 2024.

The decline in the number of dispensations in 2022 indicates that prevention strategies are beginning to show significant results in the early phase of STRADA implementation. A more drastic decline in 2023 indicates the strengthening of increasingly effective cross-actor intervention programs. Meanwhile, in 2024, the number of dispensation applications was only 4 cases, indicating that the practice of child marriage in Maros Regency is increasingly under control and approaching zero cases.

Thus, data analysis for the 2020–2024 period shows that the downward trend in marriage dispensation cases is in line with the STRADA target, which calls for a gradual reduction to reach 4% by 2026. This demonstrates that the prevention policies and programs implemented by the Maros Regency Government and its partners have had a real impact on reducing the number of child marriages in Maros Regency. A judge at the Maros Religious Court, Class 1B, also stated:

*"The efforts made by the regional government and all relevant parties to reduce the number of child marriages in Maros have been quite successful. This can be seen in the marriage dispensation data, which continues to decline each year." (Interview, October 15, 2025).*

A similar sentiment was expressed by the Director of the Makassar City Institute for Community Justice (ICJ), who stated:

*"This is evident, as we can measure, from the beginning of our collaboration with Maros, the child marriage rate was quite high. After almost seven years of collaboration, child marriages in Maros have steadily decreased every year. Marriage dispensations filed with the Religious Court have almost disappeared. And I mean, that's part of the achievement of our collaboration. Because for almost*

*seven years, we've been working together in the field to reduce child marriage." (Interview, October 24, 2025)*

The partnership between the Maros Regency Government through DP3A-DADLUK KB and various social actors is a form of Public Social Partnership (PSP), which is the main strategy in implementing the STRADA for Child Marriage Prevention 2021–2026. This collaboration is driven by the awareness that the issue of child marriage is complex and cannot be addressed by the government alone, but requires cross-sectoral cooperation.

The collaboration between the Maros Regency government and social partners has succeeded in reducing the number of child marriages. After nearly seven years of collaborative work, tangible results are evident in the consistently decreasing annual dispensation data. This demonstrates that the PSP in Maros Regency has been effective, contributing significantly to achieving STRADA targets, and has had a tangible impact on reducing the number of child marriages in Maros Regency.

**Commitment**

Commitment is reflected in the sincerity and consistency of the parties in achieving partnership goals. Commitment is not only evident through declarations or statements of support, but also through ongoing, concrete actions to ensure shared goals are achieved. When commitment is high, partners tend to demonstrate loyalty to established agreements and remain actively involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of policies/programs. This is crucial because the sustainability of a partnership is determined not only by short-term results but also by the consistency of ongoing efforts to achieve partnership goals.

Therefore, commitment is a crucial dimension of a partnership. Without strong commitment, a partnership will remain merely symbolic and will not produce tangible impact. Conversely, when commitment is strong from all parties, the partnership has a significant opportunity to achieve sustainable goals.

In preventing child marriage in Maros Regency, each agency involved is committed to its own goals and to the shared goals of the partnership. This commitment is reflected in the parties' willingness to share roles in accordance with the agreement contained in the jointly agreed upon cooperation document, namely to reduce the number of child marriages in Maros Regency, in accordance with the targets set in the 2021–2026 Child Marriage Prevention Strategy.

The Head of the Child Protection Section of the Maros Regency Family Planning and Family Planning Agency (DP3A-DADLUK KB) explained that:

*"We go to villages to conduct outreach, conveying the impacts of child marriage. Furthermore, we also have a program called PUSPAGA (Public Welfare and Religious Affairs Agency). Before children wishing to marry apply for a marriage dispensation in the religious court, they*

*must request a marriage dispensation recommendation letter. So, one of our commitments to reducing child marriage is to tighten the issuance of these recommendations.” (10/17/2025)*

The commitment of DP3A-DADLUK KB of Maros Regency as a leading sector in preventing child marriage is realized through consistent efforts to reduce the number of child marriages through direct outreach to villages to increase public understanding of the negative impacts of child marriage. In addition to outreach, DP3A-DADLUK KB also strengthens prevention mechanisms by optimizing the role of the Family Learning Center (PUSPAGA). The existence of PUSPAGA is utilized as the first layer of prevention that ensures every case of prospective child marriage receives an in-depth assessment before the dispensation is submitted to the Religious Court. Families are required to consult first at PUSPAGA to obtain an assessment related to psychological readiness, social conditions, and potential risks that may arise if the marriage is carried out. This mechanism reflects the form of DP3A-DADLUK KB's preventive commitment, because the stricter the recommendation issuance process, the smaller the chance of child marriage occurring.

When compared with the form of commitment shown by DP3A-DADLUK KB Maros Regency as the leading sector, the commitment shown by other partners in preventing child marriage in Maros Regency is also quite high. The Makassar City Institute for Community Justice (ICJ), a community organization focused on protecting and fulfilling the rights of women and children, has demonstrated a strong commitment to preventing child marriage in Maros Regency. This commitment is demonstrated through ICJ's consistent involvement since 2018, both as a policy advocacy partner and as an implementer of educational activities in the community. ICJ has played a crucial role in promoting various supporting regulations, such as the Regent's Regulation and the STRADA for Child Marriage Prevention, which serve as the formal foundation for child marriage prevention efforts in Maros Regency. Furthermore, ICJ focuses not only on policy but also on implementation and community empowerment, through outreach to adolescents and parents.

The partnership's commitment to preventing child marriage in Maros Regency comes not only from formal institutions but also from children and adolescent groups, as the actors closest to the target groups. The Coordinator of the Butta Salewangang Children's Forum in Maros Regency stated that:

*“The children's forum plays a role and focuses on prevention through outreach, both on social media and by visiting schools directly to provide education. We also have a reporting form open, which we will forward directly to the DP3A or other relevant agencies.” (10/17/2025)*

The Children's Forum demonstrates a distinct commitment by emphasizing a participatory approach where children

act as pioneers and informants. Their commitment is reflected in their active involvement in educational campaigns, outreach programs in schools, and the use of social media as an advocacy platform for child marriage issues. The Children's Forum is not merely a beneficiary but also plays a role as a peer educator, helping influence young people's perspectives on the issue of child marriage.

Unlike its counterparts, the Maros Religious Court demonstrates its commitment through regulatory enforcement and careful handling of marriage dispensation proceedings. The Maros Religious Court's commitment is reflected in its policy of tightening requirements, deepening the assessment process, and prioritizing child protection principles in every marriage dispensation decision. This demonstrates the Maros Religious Court's commitment to ensuring that marriage dispensation does not become a loophole that facilitates child marriage, but rather is placed as a last resort after all considerations of the impacts of child marriage have been carefully reviewed. Judge of the Maros Religious Court, Class 1B, stated that:

*“Various regulations strictly regulate the prevention of child marriage. However, our role, which handles divorce proceedings, also explicitly regulates this matter. There are numerous considerations for granting a marriage dispensation. Judges must consider the risks of granting a request, including the potential for dropping out of school, the economic and social impacts, and so on. So, the regulations already exist, guiding us, so we as religious courts can work together to promote government programs to prevent child marriage.” (15/10/2025)*

The prevention of child marriage in Maros Regency is supported by a strong and diverse commitment from various actors within the Public–Social Partnership framework. Each actor carries out its role according to its authority, capacity, and position, both as a state actor and a social actor, while still moving towards a common goal, namely reducing the number of child marriages. DP3A–DADLUK KB Maros Regency demonstrates its commitment as a key regional government actor through a preventive approach and policy control. The Institute for Community Justice (ICJ) of Makassar City acts as a civil society actor, strengthening partnerships through policy advocacy and public education. Meanwhile, the Butta Salewangang Children's Forum of Maros Regency represents the participatory dimension of children within the Public–Social Partnership framework. The Maros Class 1B Religious Court demonstrates regulatory and judicial commitment to supporting partnerships through the implementation of Law Number 16 of 2019 and the tightening of marriage dispensation procedures based on Supreme Court Regulation Number 5 of 2019.

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that the commitment dimension to preventing child marriage in Maros Regency has been collectively built through synergy between government actors, civil society, judicial institutions, and children's groups within a Public-Social

Partnership framework. This commitment is reflected in the continued involvement of actors, alignment of goals, and complementary roles. This serves as a crucial foundation for the effectiveness and sustainability of child marriage prevention in Maros Regency.

### CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Public–Social Partnership (PSP) in preventing child marriage in Maros Regency has proven effective and has had a tangible impact. This is reflected in the significant reduction in the number of marriage dispensation applications and decisions at the Maros Religious Court during the 2020–2024 period, which aligns with the STRADA target for Child Marriage Prevention 2021–2026. Cross-actor collaboration between local governments, judicial institutions, civil society organizations, and children's groups has strengthened prevention strategies, through policy approaches, public education, and strengthened oversight and selection mechanisms for marriage dispensations. With a near-zero case reduction, the PSP has become a strategic instrument in controlling and suppressing the practice of child marriage in Maros Regency.

In addition to effectiveness, commitment is the key foundation for the success of this partnership. Collective commitment is reflected in the consistent role and active involvement of each actor, in accordance with their authority and capacity, from the DP3A–DADLUK KB as the leading sector, the ICJ as an advocacy and education partner, the Children's Forum as a participatory actor, to the Religious Court as a regulatory enforcement institution. The synergy established demonstrates alignment of goals, clear roles, and the sustainability of child marriage prevention efforts. Thus, the public-social partnership in Maros Regency is not merely symbolic but has evolved into a sustainable collaborative effort that contributes significantly to the protection of children's rights.

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