

Exploring Factors Affecting the Rural Poor's Access to Resources and Public Services, Thailand

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Abstract

Public service involves the state's or administrative department's operations in matters aimed at meeting the collective needs of all citizens. The objectives of the research were to: 1) study access to resources and public services of the rural poor, 2) examine the factors that affected access to resources and public services, and 3) propose a policy to solve the problems related to access to resources and public services. This study employed a mixed research method. The study population included 7,520 recipients of the state welfare cards. The samples consisted of 379 state welfare cardholders. The key informants made up the 12 subjects, while the 15 participated in a group focus. The following statistics were used: percentage, mean, standard deviation, and multiple regression analysis. Qualitative data were evaluated using content classification and description. The research found that 1) the overall access to resources and public services of the rural poor was high level, 2) political, economic, social, technological, and cultural factors affected access to resources and public services of the rural poor at a high level. The five variables could predict access to resources and public services of the rural poor by 85.40 ($R^2.40 = 0.854$). An error in the prediction was statistically significant at .05 level, and 3) the recommendations were as follows: the state sectors should focus on services and reduce formality as much as possible. Increase opportunities for the poor and their communities, strengthen public-state agency relationships, make technological equipment accessible, and focus on cultural capital-based community strengthening.

Keywords: *Access to resources and public services; inequality; rural poor.*

Introduction

Thailand's position on inequality and poverty stems from poverty and material inequality, which are the causes of intergenerational poverty. Inequality in expenditures is likely to rise from the Gini coefficient for consumer expenditures in 2020, which was 0.350, up from 0.348 in 2019. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, consumption expenditures have increased, raising the cost of everyday living. Furthermore, security inequality in Thailand is substantial, with traits that accumulate or are passed on to future generations. Furthermore, this situation has resulted in an economic downturn. This has led to an increase in the number of destitute people. The possibility of escaping the poverty trap is becoming more challenging. Poverty is passed down through generations to children and grandchildren, while also reinforcing Thai society's structural flaws. Inequalities in education and the development of quality labor skills, as well as in access to and usage of technology, infrastructure, and public services. This includes a lack of basic security and welfare. Creating stability in life may have a long-term impact on a country's growth (Royal Gazette, 2022).

Poverty and inequality have resulted in unequal access to resources and the provision of many public services in society. Farmers and informal workers, who account for the two largest groups in the country, continue to lack social security entitlements. Opportunity to access resources (development is the creation of freedom), complete development from ground up, integrating current science and technology, development by searching for actual problems, and there is hope for development. Focusing on poverty and inequality is more than a statistical approach. Everyone aims to transform not only the economics, but also the suffering of our fellow beings (Mankhong, 2021). There are groups in society that do not have access to welfare, such as the elderly. Minority groups or indigenous people are deprived of their rights to resources such as land, water supplies, and forests as a result of ongoing grabbing activities. Debtors resulting from losses and reliance on expensive technology or low-wage labor. Unfair work and lack of living resources have created shaky situations, resulting in a variety of challenges. These groups do not have

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equitable and fair access to development benefits and lack the same capacity to cope and adapt as other groups (Cruz-Del Rosario & Rigg, 2019; Tabouratzi et al., 2023; Taena et al., 2023).

Providing public services (Public Services Management) is the responsibility of the government sector, and it is regarded as the government sector's job to respond to the demands of the people as a whole. Organizing society can ensure stability, peace, and order for citizens and society. Providing living amenities to ensure a high quality of life or the provision of public services by the state in the form of a welfare state. Legal support is consistent and does not vary depending on the state of government (De Soto, 1989). Public services are therefore the operations of the state or administrative department in the affairs at hand. Under the direction or supervision of the administrative department to meet needs. The participation of all citizens, including education, health, work, income, access to the justice system, and social services. The state or administrative department must provide appropriate and quality measures to meet the needs of respond to the basic needs of the people to have better quality (Nanthaphirat, 2022).

Don Mot Daeng District is situated in the northeastern section of Ubon Ratchathani Province. The distance is approximately 32 km. The overall area is 213 square kilometers (133,125 rai). The area is lowland, with numerous rivers and creeks running through. The rainy season causes flooding and road damage. River resources exist, with the Mun River being the most important stream. The overall condition is that it is a rural area with small districts, resources, and public services. The state is still unable to contact people fully. Agriculture employs 80 percent of the district's inhabitants, with contract occupations following closely. There are 5,352 houses and 20,129 people, with an average annual income of 55,100 Baht (Ubon Ratchathani Provincial Statistical Office, 2019). It is also a district where several government agencies and provincial governments have prioritized addressing community poverty and inequality issues and creating a better quality of life for residents. The issues of inequality and poverty in these communities are critical to the process. Developing public policies related to government services and aiding in addressing policy gaps and inequality. Accessing government support is critical to a country's political development as well as its economic and social sustainability.

Therefore, the researchers is interested in investigating and assessing the factors that influence inequality in access to resources and public services for the poor in the rural areas of Don Mot Daeng District, Ubon Ratchathani Province. In terms of resources, education, economics, society, and public health, this includes research on the conditions and factors affecting access to resources and state-provided public services. In addition, a policy proposal was made to comprehensively and efficiently address the issue of access to state resources and public services.

Research Objectives

1. To study access to resources and public services of the rural poor
2. To examine the factors that affected access to resources and public services
3. To propose a policy to solve the problems related to access to resources and public services

Conceptual Framework

Schlager & Ostrom (1996a:1996) association between people and resources is based on a synthesis of concepts, theories, and research resources. The conceptual framework can be defined as follows: decentralization of administration by Rondinelli, Nellis, and Cheema (1980), Millett's (1954) public service, inequality by Von Mises (2002), Diamond (2009), Gidens (2009), and Kurian (2011).

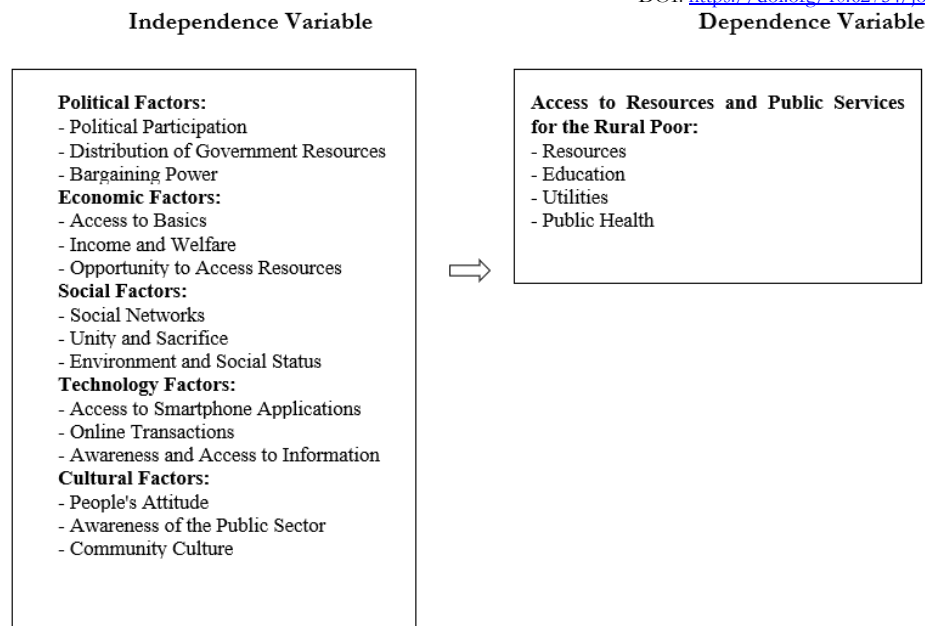


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.

Methodology

This research used a mixed-methods research model that consisted of quantitative and qualitative research. The research were divided into two steps as follows.

Step 1: Quantitative Research

This study focuses on the rural poor's access to resources and public services, as well as the factors that affect the availability of public resources and services in the Don Mot Daeng District, Ubon Ratchathani Province, Thailand.

Population and Samples

The Don Mot Daeng District in Ubon Ratchathani Province has a population of 7,520 people who hold welfare cards. The sample group comprised 379 people with state welfare cards. Samples were determined by random sampling using the Yamane formula (Yamane, 1973) and a simple random sampling method.

Research Instruments

The questionnaire on access to state resources and services, including factors affecting access to state resources and services, included a five-point rating scale. The quality of the tool was determined by giving the updated questionnaire to five experts and assessing its content validity. The generated questionnaire was completed, and the inspection was passed. In terms of substance, 52 try-outs with low-income individuals use the state welfare cards of the Det Udom District, Ubon Ratchathani province. Which were the top five districts in the Ubon Ratchathani province in terms of the average annual income per person, this was a small-scale experiment with a population outside the research area. The data were analyzed for the index of discrimination of each item using item-total correlation by determining the correlation coefficient for each item with the total score of the questionnaire. The items obtained according to the criteria were analyzed to determine the reliability of the questionnaire by finding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.95. The researchers used a revised version of the questionnaire. The original group of experts was asked to listen to opinions and make suggestions.

Data Analysis

Analyzing basic statistical data using descriptive statistics comprising percentage, frequency, mean, and standard deviation, and investigating factors that affecting access to resources and public services. Multiple regression analysis was used to assess the state of the rural poor.

Step 2: Qualitative Research

Policy initiatives have improved the rural poor's access to public resources and services. The researchers collected data through a review of the literature, theoretical concepts, and research related to government public services, alongside in-depth interviews with a group of 12 key informants, including two academics who were researchers or community developers, and four representatives of state welfare card holders. Representing four sub-districts within the Don Mot Daeng District. Six government agency representatives were present in addition to representatives from local administrative organizations, district community development, provincial social development, and welfare offices. Purposive sampling and 15 people focus groups were used. The researchers used three study methods to acquire data: non-participant observation, participant observation, and an interview form. The data were then evaluated using content analysis and descriptive explanations, and reliability was checked. The triangulation technique will be used to ensure data reliability (Chantawanich, 2010). This entails asking the same questions to multiple groups of informants (various departments), regions, situations, or periods. This was considered to ensure the accuracy and dependability of the responses received.

Results

Objective 1: The research results found access to resources and public services for the rural poor in Don Mot Daeng District, Ubon Ratchathani Province. Overall, it was high level ($M = 3.42$, $S.D. = 0.82$). When considering each aspect from highest to lowest, it was found that the public health aspect was at a high level ($M = 3.72$, $S.D. = 0.73$), followed by education at a high level ($M = 3.41$, $S.D. = 0.86$), utility at a moderate level ($M = 3.37$, $S.D. = 0.90$), and resources were at a moderate level ($M = 3.18$, $S.D. = 0.80$), respectively (Table 1).

Table 1.

The Mean, Standard Deviation, and Overall Interpretation of Access to Resources and Services. The Public Sector Serves the Rural Poor as the Entire Population.

Access to Public Resources and Services	<i>M</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	Level
1. Resources	3.18	0.80	Moderate
2. Education	3.41	0.86	High
3. Utilities	3.37	0.90	Moderate
4. Public Health	3.72	0.73	High
Total	3.42	0.82	High

Objective 2: To determine the factors affecting poor rural access to resources and public services in the Don Mot Daeng District, Ubon Ratchathani Province. The findings highlight political, economic, social, technological, and cultural challenges. Capable of forecasting how disadvantaged rural people will access resources and government services. Political ($\beta = 1.114$), economic ($\beta = 0.186$), social ($\beta = 0.149$), technical ($\beta = 0.241$), and cultural factors ($\beta = -0.574$) are statistically significant at the .05 level. A multiple correlation coefficient of 0.724 suggests a substantial connection. The correlation value (R) ranged from 0.71 to 0.90, indicating a good relationship. This showed that the five independent variables political, economic, social, and technological, along with cultural characteristics, have a major impact on the rural poor's access to resources and government services. Table 2 showed that the five variables predict 85.40 percent of the rural poor's access to resources and public services ($R^2 = 0.854$), with a standard error of forecast ($S.E._{est} = 0.242$).

Table 2.

Multiple Regression Analysis between Factors Affecting Access to Resources and Public Services for the Rural Poor Don Mot Daeng District, Ubon Ratchathani Province.

Predictor	B	S.E._{est}	β	T	Sig.
1. Political	0.841	0.109	1.114	7.708	0.000*
2. Economic	0.148	0.038	0.186	3.935	0.000*
3. Social	0.122	0.049	0.149	2.462	0.014*
4. Technology	0.175	0.036	0.241	4.861	0.000*
5. Cultural	0.465	0.106	0.574	4.378	0.000*

Note: *Statistically significant at the .05 level, $\alpha = 1.752$, $S.E._{Est} = 0.242$, $F = 49.514$, $R = 0.724$, $R^2 = 0.854$.

From Table 2, it was found that all five variables together predict 85.40 percent of the rural poor's access to resources and public services ($R^2 = 0.854$) has a standard error of forecast ($S.E._{East} = 0.242$). The importance weight of each predictive variable is given in the form of raw scores (B) as follows: 1) political factors, 2) economic factors, 3) social factors, 4) technological factors, and 5) cultural factors. The prediction equation can be written in the form of a raw score (B) and standard score (β) as in the following equation:

Prediction Equation (raw score)

$Y \text{ Access to resources} = \alpha + B \text{ (Politics)} + B \text{ (Economy)} + B \text{ (Society)} + B \text{ (Technology)} + B \text{ (Culture)}$
Therefore, when substituting the values from Table 4.17 into the equation, the study obtains the following:

$Y \text{ Access to resources} = 1.752 + 0.841 \text{ (Politics)} + 0.148 \text{ (Economy)} + (0.122) \text{ (Society)} + 0.175 \text{ (Technology)} + (0.465) \text{ (Culture)}$

Prediction Equation (standard score)

$Z \text{ Access to resources} = \beta \text{ (Politics)} + \beta \text{ (Economy)} + \beta \text{ (Society)} + \beta \text{ (Technology)} + \beta \text{ (Culture)}$

Therefore, when substituting the values from Table 2 into the equation, the study obtains following:

$Z = 1.114 \text{ (Politics)} + 0.186 \text{ (Economy)} + (0.149) \text{ (Society)} + 0.241 \text{ Technology)} + (0.574) \text{ (Culture)}$

Objective 3: Policy proposals to address problems of access to resources and public services for the rural poor were as follows:

Political

Setting laws or guidelines for providing public services requires government agencies to solicit cooperation from all sectors, resulting in the formation of civil society networks. Emphasize transparency, develop new techniques or solutions, and focus on establishing a high-quality life for people by emphasizing equality. Reduce formality in unnecessary service procedures and maintain a service system database.

Economic Government Agencies

The government should expand its potential and provide opportunities for the poor and communities by focusing on the development of education and vocational skills for children and youth from low-income families, the working-age poor, and the community economy. Furthermore, the social protection system should be strengthened by encouraging the creation of self-sufficient community welfare funds, allowing local administrative entities to support operating budgets based on the community's readiness.

Social

The emphasis was on equitable opportunities for social promotion, fostering love and connection, fraternity, and kinship among locals. Respect for people's decisions strengthens this sector. Civil society considers the physical necessities of an area's residents. Landowners eat well and live comfortably.

Technology

Government agencies should focus on developing digital infrastructure to boost efficiency through the use of technical services, while also improving the level of government service with people at its core. The emphasis was on building technological skills for certain target groups, such as the elderly, crippled, or vulnerable populations. Accessing technology and online information in addition to supporting and promoting the preparedness of effective technological equipment images and an Internet network that is reliable for use.

Cultural

Activities should be expanded to provide community leaders with intellectual resources. Local people can comprehend concepts and principles and assess local community problems through learning and shared practices among people in the community. Community development should be founded on culture, thus laying the groundwork for a strong society. Developing knowledge and comprehension of changes in the nature of communities using current science.

In this context, policy proposals for tackling access challenges can be characterized as public resources and services, as indicated in figure 2:

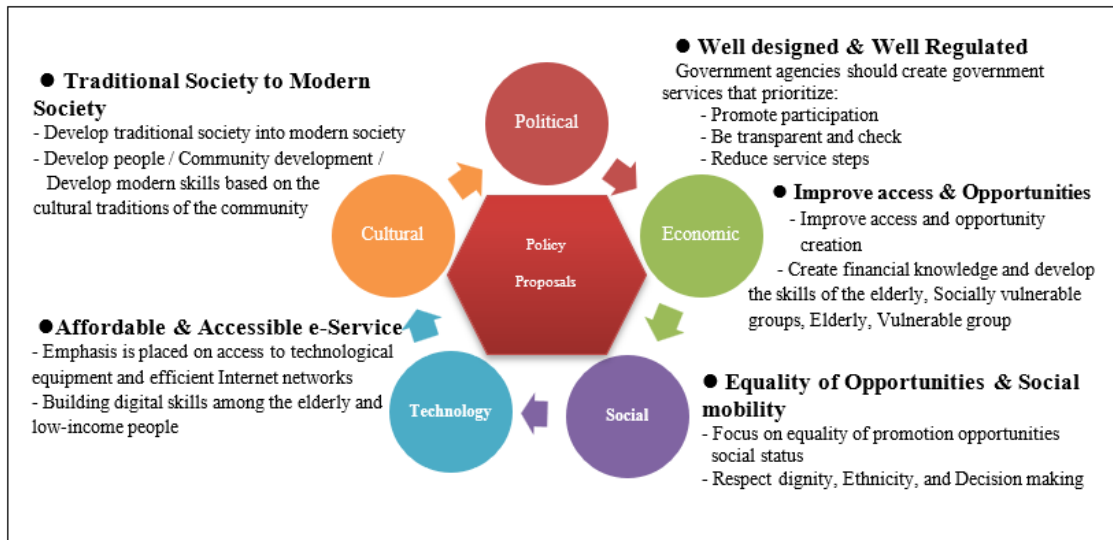


Figure 2. Policy proposals for Solving the Problem of Access to Public Resources and Services.

Discussion

Based on the findings, the rural poor in the Don Mot Daeng district of Ubonratchathani province had good access to resources and public services on average. This encompasses education, utilities, and resources. However, utilities and resources remained at modest levels. Nevertheless, the rural poor continue to have great access to resources and public services because of improvements in the Don Mot Daeng District. This has been encouraging and developing, with inhabitants being content with the area, population, home, and environment of the service area, which is small and accessible, particularly the education and utilities policy, which includes a basic school in every district and village. Even though some schools appeared to be distant, transportation was available to address this issue. This explains why the rural poor have easy access to resources and public services. Muenmee and Ratchatapulphob (2019) studied the public services of Nonthaburi local governments and found that citizens' satisfaction and attitude toward public services, which are appropriate, equal, and punctual, were at a high level. Sangiam and Silpaphisan (2020) studied the quality of organizations and public services of local governments in Lopburi province and found that the overall quality is at a high level. Focusing on service recipients, personnel and process management were the three factors that affected the result meant to be high level. The results found that political, economic, social, technological, and cultural factors can predict access to resources and public services among the rural poor. It has statistical significance at the .05 level, which will be discussed according to the research hypotheses as follows:

Political

Political it has an impact on how poor people in rural areas may access resources and public services according to the expectations made in the Don Mot Daeng istrict, Ubon Ratchathani province. This can be the case because modern culture uses a variety of Internet communication platforms that enable people to obtain information from governmental organizations, make political activity accessible, and allow for the expression of political viewpoints. Political expression or engagement to demand public or community benefits from government agencies or community leaders and the different ways in which rights were used at the municipal, state, and federal levels were considered. Klommuang and Kersdap (2020) studied public policy and the political involvement process. It was discovered that when people participate in control, they participate in politics and examine and monitor government agency activities, including involvement in the formulation of government policy and decision-making processes, and management of the social, political, and economic factors that have an impact on people's daily existence.

Economic

In rural communities, the state of the economy influences the poor's ability to access resources and public services. This could be a result of government agencies' development and marketing policies. Local higher education institutions' research and innovative development initiatives using knowledge to advance the industry encourages businesses or activities that offer sufficient income for people to live, which should come from a variety of sources.

For instance, village funds, various the Pracharat projects, community incorporation groups, savings groups, and local product development groups. These were the creation of spaces or opportunities for people in the area to access resources and services from government agencies. According to Rungwong et al. (2023), it was found that government policy has an indirect influence, and the combined influence affects the strengthening of justice networks to reduce economic inequality in the community statistically significant at the .01 level. According to Saibunyuen (2021), raised household income should be the goal of any policy implemented to fight household inequality in a sustainable manner, modifying the way taxes and transfers are spent by the government. An organized strategy is needed when creating policies to lessen household inequality.

Social

Social factors can influence how disadvantaged individuals access resources and public services in rural areas. This can be attributed to agriculture being the main industry in these areas, and communities being relatively small in size. As a result, establishing personal connections within the community and enjoying a low cost of living can be more feasible than in larger areas. In these settings, it may be easier to rely on natural resources and live in close-knit communities, where people engage in activities together and support one another. Activities were conducted in groups by engaging with local customs and culture within the community. When issues arose, complaints were made by village headmen and community leaders, who then collaborated to the best of their ability. It was simpler for people to gather in response to a government agency's call in rural areas than in urban areas to facilitate access to public services. According to Chiangthong (2017) and Satyanurak (2013), the close-knit, supportive rural community's scent still lingers in the modern era, as evidenced by the villagers' use of language. They refer to people in the community as "Por Mae Pee Nong," their own village as "Baan Rour," and community activities for public benefit or organizing traditional festivals as "Activities for the Public." They continue to maintain their local customs and traditions. Therefore, it can be said that the current face of the Thai countryside is a society that combines modern and traditional elements, differing in some dimensions from urban society.

Technology

The availability of resources and public services for impoverished individuals in rural regions may be impacted by this. Despite residing in rural areas, these individuals may still be embracing technological advancements in their communities. By providing rural areas with information about government events through various smartphone technology platforms and enabling them to participate in or access benefits from government projects or activities, this could be accomplished. Nevertheless, there can be certain restrictions, including poor Internet signals, and a variety of applications must be supported by advanced technology. According to Puttasem (2023), studied information systems for community development and found that, information technology is currently used in greater quantities throughout the country. The number of people accessing the Internet is expanding. Therefore, online information distribution by government organizations is a simple and cost-effective way to keep recipients or the general public up to date on news, effective information system management, staying relevant to current events, and remaining within the organization's authority. As a result, system management for community information development must encompass all areas and sectors in equal measure to ensure long-term national development.

Culture

It has an impact on how disadvantaged rural residents may access resources and public services. This could be the result of the significant cultural capital identified in rural areas. Communities were prepared in a variety of conditions to serve as review centers for government programs that began in the neighborhood. Because the community possesses significant social and cultural capital, for example, the community's way

of life adheres to "*Heet Sib Song Kong Sip See*," a *Tai Isan* practice pattern based on Buddhist teachings. There were monks eager to guide you and serve as leaders in the community's culture and practices. This makes it easy for the community to reach an agreement on various activities, and the community's cultural capital can be used to create social management mechanisms. As per Chuliratchaneekorn et al. (2019), who explored the role of community arts and culture in driving spatial development in the province of Phetchaburi, researchers found that engaging in imaginative conversation activities to express knowledge gained from experiences can aid the community in reflecting on their past and recognizing both their strengths and weaknesses in the social dimension. Thus, guidelines for the development of cultural regions have been established. Therefore, community members might criticize, admire, and respect their community while recognizing its advantages over their own. The students enjoyed learning about their relatives and had no idea how important cultural heritage was in the area. According to Chaiwong et al. (2022) investigated community cultural and sustainable development and discovered that the concept of community culture is an important resource for society. The state can promote local culture and religious values to enhance community life and environmental balance. By encouraging cultural exchange and incorporating international culture, individuals can develop mentally and socially. Culture serves as a powerful tool in strengthening communities, and by embracing the concept of giving and learning from one another's expertise, faith in a community's ability to foster sustainable development can be instilled.

Suggestions

Suggestions for Applying the Results of Study

According to the research findings, resources and public utilities were at a moderate level, particularly the distribution of natural resources and water resources, forests, transportation, power, and water, which are basic necessities for survival. Consequently, relevant government entities at the provincial, district, and municipal administrative levels should encourage or elevate initiatives. There is complete access to services, taking into account the participation of impoverished people living in rural regions to create participation and eliminate inequality by adhering to the concept of equality in a fair and efficient manner.

Based on the study's findings, political, economic, social, technological, and cultural issues all have an impact on the rural poor's access to resources and public services. Therefore, government agencies, local government organizations, civil society, and the public sector should reach an agreement to collaborate in the implementation of integrated projects and activities. Using the community as a foundation for community-building activities, communities collaborate with government agencies to develop strategies or strategic plans in each area to address poverty and inequality, which are barriers to accessing public resources and state services.

From political policy ideas, government organizations should focus on providing services while keeping formality to a minimum. The economy should boost the potential and opportunities for the disadvantaged, while communities should encourage the community economy. Society should promote coexistence in rural society between inhabitants and government entities to foster affection and affinity among locals. In terms of technology, readiness in technological equipment should support high-quality Internet networks. In terms of culture, focus should be placed on strengthening communities through cultural capital.

Further Study

A study of other districts or areas that cover population groups with poverty and inequality at all levels in access to government public services should be conducted in order to compare the differences that exist in each.

Qualitative studies should be conducted with a specific focus on the rural poor, or vulnerable groups in rural areas who do not have access to government resources and services, in order to solve the problem of poverty and reduce inequality.

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