

DYNAMICS OF THE GENDER DEVELOPMENT INDEX AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT INDEX IN BENGKULU CITY 2019–2023: AN ANALYSIS OF LOCAL FACTORS BASED ON STATISTICAL DATA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the dynamics of the Gender Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Index (GEI) in Bengkulu City from 2019 to 2023 and identifies local factors influencing their changes. Using a quantitative descriptive approach and secondary data from the Bengkulu Province Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS), the analysis focuses on GDI dimensions such as health, education, and economy and GEI determinants such as women's participation in parliament, income contribution, and professional representation. The study employs a gender and development framework to interpret equality progress and policy implications. Findings reveal that Bengkulu City's GDI increased by 0.15 points, reaching 96.12 in 2023, indicating improved gender parity in development outcomes. Conversely, the GEI decreased by 4.41 points to 75.94, highlighting persistent challenges in women's empowerment, particularly in politics and professional sectors. Contributing factors include limited female representation in parliament, fluctuating women's income contributions due to the rise of female breadwinners, and the persistence of the glass ceiling restricting women's career advancement. These findings suggest that while gender equality in basic development indicators has improved, empowerment dimensions remain constrained, emphasizing the need for targeted and sustainable gender-responsive policies.

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INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality remains both a national and international concern. Within the framework of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, achieving gender equality and empowering women are viewed not only as moral imperatives but also as prerequisites for inclusive and sustainable growth (Sudirman & Susilawaty, 2022). The persistent gender gap across multiple sectors such as health, education, economy, and politics—continues to limit social equity and human development. In Indonesia, gender inequality reflects deep-rooted structural and cultural

barriers that have not been fully dismantled despite progressive policy reforms. The Global Gender Gap Report ranked Indonesia 101st out of 156 countries, indicating that only about 69 percent of gender parity has been achieved. This global standing highlights the urgency of addressing gender-based disparities at both the national and local levels (Annastasya, 2024).

Conceptually, gender refers to socially constructed roles, positions, and responsibilities assigned to men and women, shaped by cultural norms, values, and beliefs. These constructions often determine individuals' access to resources, decision-making power, and participation in development. Gender disparities in Indonesia are still reflected in various socio-economic indicators, including unequal access to education, health, employment, and representation in political institutions. According to Komnas Perempuan (2023), cases of violence against women and discriminatory practices continue to rise, revealing enduring gender-based structural inequality. Addressing such disparities requires not only improving access and outcomes but also transforming the power relations that sustain them (Rachmawati et al., 2023).

The Gender Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Empowerment Index (GEI) serve as key composite indicators to assess gender equality from two complementary perspectives. The GDI, as an adaptation of the Human Development Index (HDI), measures the relative achievements of women and men in health, education, and economy—dimensions often described as capabilities. In contrast, the GEI reflects women's participation and influence in economic and political life—dimensions representing agency and empowerment (Kurnianingsih et al., 2022). A high GDI value indicates minimal disparity in development outcomes, while a high GEI demonstrates active gender participation in decision-making and income generation. Yet, empirical evidence from Indonesia shows that improvement in GDI does not always translate into higher GEI. This divergence suggests that the enhancement of basic human capabilities does not automatically lead to women's empowerment, as structural and cultural factors may inhibit their participation in public and political life (Annastasya, 2024; Rachmawati et al., 2023).

In Bengkulu Province, the gender equality challenge remains salient. The Human Development Index (HDI) of Bengkulu ranks fourth lowest in Sumatra, indicating persistent disparities in access to education, health, and economic welfare (Badan Pusat Statistik 2023). Despite these limitations, Bengkulu City shows relatively stable GDI performance, with incremental improvement in life expectancy, mean years of schooling, and per capita expenditure. However, its Gender Empowerment Index (GEI) has experienced fluctuations, particularly a decline in women's parliamentary representation from 28.57% in 2020 to 25% in 2022 (Badan Pusat Statistik 2023). This pattern reflects the paradox of progress: although women's basic development indicators have improved, their empowerment and political agency remain stagnant. Understanding this discrepancy requires a comprehensive analysis that integrates both structural and socio-cultural determinants of gender inequality.

Several previous studies have examined regional gender development performance in Indonesia. Kertati (2021) analyzed Surakarta City and found that gender development and empowerment levels were above the provincial average, yet still constrained by stereotypes and limited access to resources. Aini (2021) emphasized that inclusive development in East Java remained uneven due to lingering gender disparities, while Annastasya (2024) identified patriarchal culture and weak policy implementation as the main causes of gender inequality in Papua. Although these studies contribute valuable insights, they tend to focus on either development outcomes (GDI) or empowerment outcomes (GEI) separately, often at the provincial level. Consequently, they overlook the simultaneous dynamics of both indices at the city level and fail to explain why improvement in one dimension does not necessarily correspond to progress in the other.

The present study positions itself within this research gap. It investigates the dynamics of the GDI and GEI in Bengkulu City during 2019–2023, emphasizing the interplay between local factors—such as women's political representation, income contribution, and professional participation—that shape these indices over time. The study is anchored in Moser's (2012) Gender and Development (GAD) framework, which conceptualizes the relationship between access (capability) and power (agency) as the core of gender equality. Through this lens, the study interprets Bengkulu's gender trends not merely as statistical variations but as reflections of underlying institutional and cultural structures that influence women's agency in public life. Although these studies contribute valuable insights, they tend to focus on either development outcomes (GDI) or empowerment outcomes (GEI) separately, often at the provincial level. Consequently, they overlook the simultaneous dynamics of both indices at the city level and fail to explain why improvement in one dimension does not necessarily correspond to progress in the other. Building upon these findings,

recent gender development research has increasingly emphasized the need for multi-level and longitudinal analyses that capture spatial and temporal variations in gender equality (Nurfadilah, 2021; Singh et al., 2021; Altan-Olcay, 2022). However, empirical studies in Indonesia that integrate both capability and agency dimensions using city-level data remain limited. The 2019–2023 period provides a particularly relevant context, given the socio-economic disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic that disproportionately affected women’s employment, income, and political participation. This period thus offers an opportunity to examine how external shocks interact with structural gender dynamics at the local level, shaping variations in both gender development and empowerment outcomes.

Thus, this study aims to (1) analyze the trend and dynamics of the Gender Development Index (GDI) in Bengkulu City during 2019–2023, and (2) identify the local factors influencing the Gender Empowerment Index (GEI) within the same period. By combining quantitative descriptive analysis with the Gender and Development framework, this research seeks to provide empirical evidence explaining the divergence between gender development and empowerment outcomes at the municipal level. The findings are expected to inform the design of more effective, evidence-based, and gender-responsive local policies.

The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive integration of both GDI and GEI dynamics at the city level within a single analytical framework. While previous research generally treated these indices independently, this study examines their interaction over time and situates them within local political and socio-economic contexts. By doing so, it contributes new insight into how local structural conditions, particularly women’s political representation and income contribution, mediate the relationship between gender development and empowerment.

Finally, the contribution of this study is threefold. Theoretically, it advances the application of the Gender and Development framework to urban socio-economic analysis, linking statistical indicators with conceptual understandings of capability and agency. Empirically, it offers longitudinal, city-level evidence that deepens understanding of gender inequality dynamics in medium-development regions. Practically, it provides a policy-oriented foundation for developing targeted, gender-responsive programs that address both the enhancement of women’s capabilities and their empowerment within decision-making and economic spheres.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a quantitative descriptive approach using secondary data obtained from the Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS) Bengkulu Province covering the period 2019–2023. The analysis focused on the trends and dynamics of the Gender Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Index (GEI) in Bengkulu City, as well as on the identification of local factors influencing these indices. The data were verified for completeness and consistency across the five-year period, and descriptive statistics were used to illustrate patterns and fluctuations of both indices. The analysis aimed to depict how gender disparities evolved in the domains of health, education, and economy (GDI) and in the areas of political participation and economic empowerment (GEI). To deepen interpretation, the study applied trend analysis and correlation assessment to capture relationships between gender development and empowerment dimensions, emphasizing changes over time and their socio-economic determinants.

The research design was anchored in Moser’s (2012) Gender and Development (GAD) framework, which conceptualizes gender equality as the balance between access (capability) and power (agency). This framework was used to interpret the interaction between GDI and GEI in the local context, providing insight into how structural, economic, and cultural factors influence gender empowerment. The 2019–2023 timeframe was also selected to capture the socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly impacted women’s participation and income opportunities. The results are presented descriptively, supported by visual data interpretation and theoretical reasoning, to provide empirical evidence for formulating gender-responsive local policies in Bengkulu City.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Trends and Determinants of the Gender Development Index (GDI) in Bengkulu City, 2019–2023

The Gender Development Index (GDI) of Bengkulu City showed a steady upward trend during the 2019–2023 period, indicating improvements in women’s basic capabilities in health, education, and economy. The GDI increased

from 95.97 in 2019 to 96.12 in 2023, reflecting a consistent narrowing of gender gaps in human development outcomes.

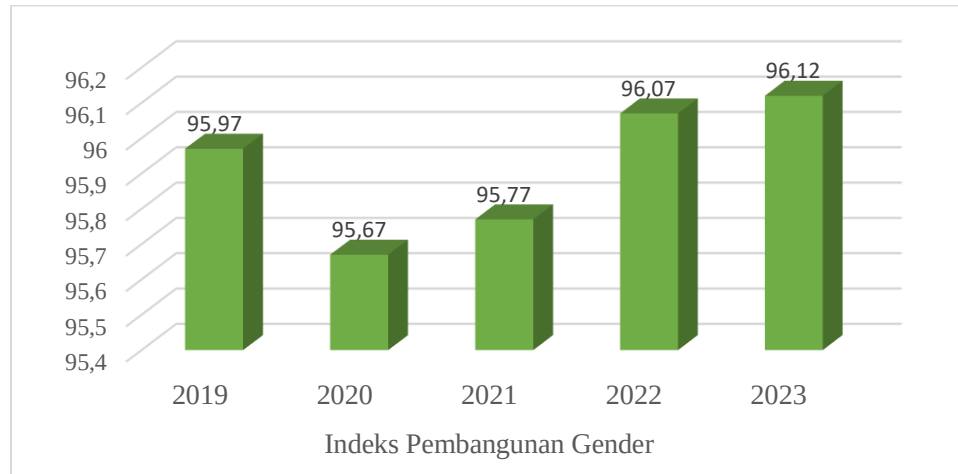


Figure 1. Gender Development Index (GDI) Bengkulu City 2019–2023

Sources: bengkulu.bps.go.id

The improvement was largely driven by the steady rise in life expectancy at birth, which reached 74.43 years in 2023, indicating better access to healthcare services and maternal health programs, particularly those ensuring that women receive adequate reproductive healthcare and nutritional support. Consequently, the health dimension stands as one of the most significant determinants contributing to the rise of the GDI in Bengkulu City. Figure 2 presents a detailed illustration of this trend, highlighting the progress achieved in the health dimension throughout the study period.

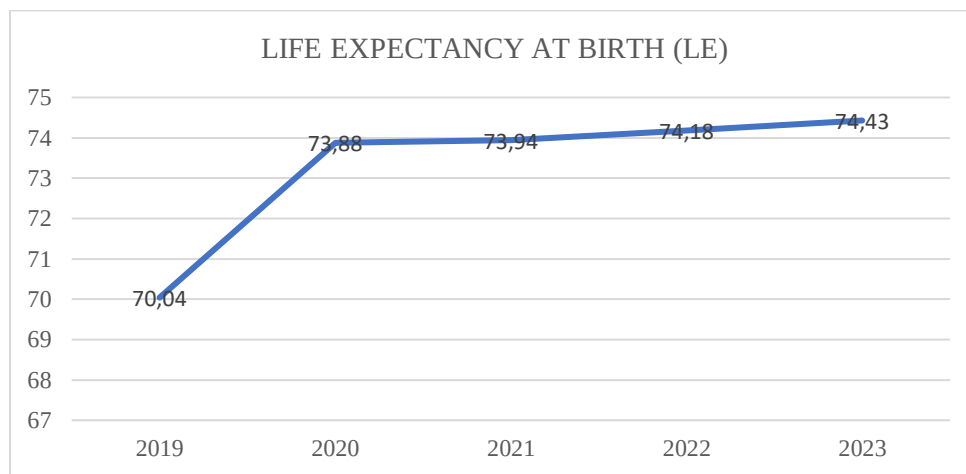


Figure 2. Life Expectancy at Birth in Bengkulu City 2019–2023

Sources: bengkulu.bps.go.id

According to the life expectancy (LE) data presented above, there is no specific classification distinguishing between low, medium, or high categories. However, based on the 2020 Population Census, Indonesia's national life expectancy in 2023 was recorded at 73.11 years (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023). This indicates that Bengkulu City's LE exceeds the national average, suggesting a relatively higher quality of public health compared to other provinces.

An increase in life expectancy can be achieved through the reduction of infant mortality rates, which is closely linked to the availability of qualified medical personnel and improved access to healthcare services. Expanding the number and competence of healthcare providers—particularly physicians and midwives assisting childbirth—has proven effective in minimizing infant deaths. In addition, comprehensive immunization coverage among infants and toddlers plays a vital role in improving child survival rates.

Nevertheless, a notable social phenomenon persists in which some children under five do not receive immunizations. This condition may stem from limited access to health information and facilities or from parental hesitation regarding the perceived effectiveness of vaccines. Certain parents refrain from immunizing their children due to doubts about the full protective capacity of vaccines, reflecting ongoing challenges in public health awareness and trust. Beyond immunization, the availability of professional birth attendants remains an indispensable component of maternal and child health improvement. In 2023, as many as 99.78 percent of childbirths in Bengkulu City were assisted by medical professionals—either doctors or midwives—an increase compared to 2022 (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024). This improvement highlights the significant progress in healthcare delivery, particularly in rural areas, and demonstrates the local government's success in expanding access to qualified medical personnel across communities.

The improvement in the health dimension of Bengkulu City's GDI signifies not only better access to healthcare but also the gradual transformation of women's fundamental capabilities into more equitable life outcomes. The higher life expectancy reflects the effectiveness of local public health interventions, especially in maternal and child health, yet persistent gaps in immunization coverage and health literacy reveal that progress remains uneven. This finding aligns with recent studies emphasizing that longevity gains must be accompanied by quality, equity, and trust in healthcare systems to sustain gender-based wellbeing (Kurnianingsih et al., 2022; Rahmawati et al., 2023). Thus, sustained enhancement of women's health must be accompanied by strategies that expand their agency in decision-making, economic participation, and community leadership, ensuring that gains in capability translate into real empowerment.

The educational dimension of the Gender Development Index (GDI) in Bengkulu City demonstrates continuous progress, reflecting improved access, participation, and attainment among women during 2019–2023. Both Mean Years of Schooling (MYS) and Expected Years of Schooling (EYS) exhibit an upward trajectory, confirming that educational opportunities are becoming more inclusive. The higher MYS among women—rising from 11.50 years in 2019 to 11.77 years in 2022, suggests that gender parity in education has been achieved and even reversed in favor of women. This achievement aligns with Indonesia's ongoing implementation of the 12-year compulsory education policy, which has expanded opportunities for both boys and girls to complete formal schooling.

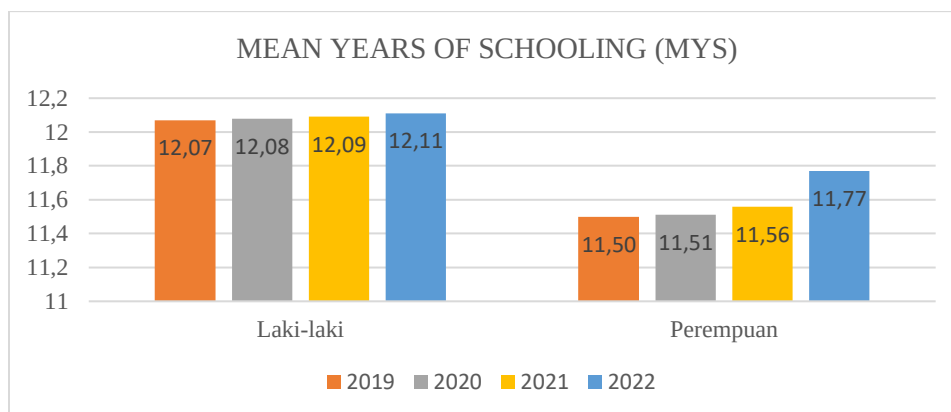


Figure 3. Mean Years of Schooling (MYS) in Bengkulu City 2019-2022

Sources: Bengkulu.bps.go.id

Although there is no categorical classification for low, medium, or high MYS, the data indicate that Bengkulu City's average MYS is higher than the provincial average. In 2023, the provincial MYS was recorded at 9.25 years for men and 8.80 years for women, highlighting the city's effective educational outreach and social inclusion efforts (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023a).

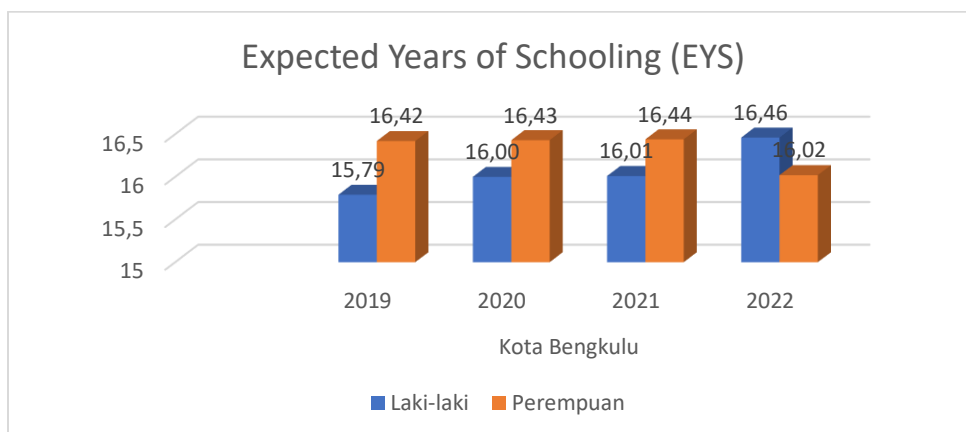


Figure 4. Expected Years of Schooling (EYS) in Bengkulu City 2019-2022

Sources: Bengkulu.bps.go.id

Similarly, the Expected Years of Schooling (EYS) shows a positive trend, with male students' EYS increasing from 15.79 years in 2019 to 16.46 years in 2022, reflecting a 0.67-point rise. Meanwhile, the EYS for females remained relatively stable at around 16.4 years from 2019 to 2021, but slightly declined by 0.42 points to 16.02 years in 2022. The finding that seven-year-old girls in Bengkulu City are projected to complete up to 16 years of education—comparable to a bachelor's degree—illustrates substantial human capital potential females (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023a).

This pattern supports Annastasya (2024), argument that stronger educational aspirations among women contribute significantly to enhancing their competitiveness in the labor market and to the overall quality of human capital. Nonetheless, certain socio-economic factors continue to impede equitable educational attainment. Persistent poverty, limited parental support, and cultural perceptions that undervalue higher education for girls remain barriers

to full participation. These challenges echo findings from recent studies emphasizing that social norms and economic constraints still influence educational continuity among women in Indonesia (Rahmawati et al., 2023; Kurnianingsih et al., 2022).

The educational achievements of women in Bengkulu City illustrate tangible progress in capability development and a narrowing gender gap in schooling. However, disparities in opportunity rooted in household income, parental attitudes, and sociocultural expectations continue to limit the transformative potential of education. This implies that education, while a crucial pillar of gender development, does not automatically ensure empowerment unless accompanied by policies that address socio-economic inequality and promote equitable access to post-school opportunities. Strengthening vocational pathways, financial support for low-income students, and community-based awareness programs could help translate educational attainment into greater agency and participation, thus reinforcing both the GDI and future improvements in the Gender Empowerment Index (GEI).

The improvement in the economic dimension of Bengkulu City's GDI reflects tangible progress in material welfare, as indicated by the increase in per capita expenditure from IDR 14,030 in 2022 to IDR 14,924 in 2023—an annual rise of IDR 894.

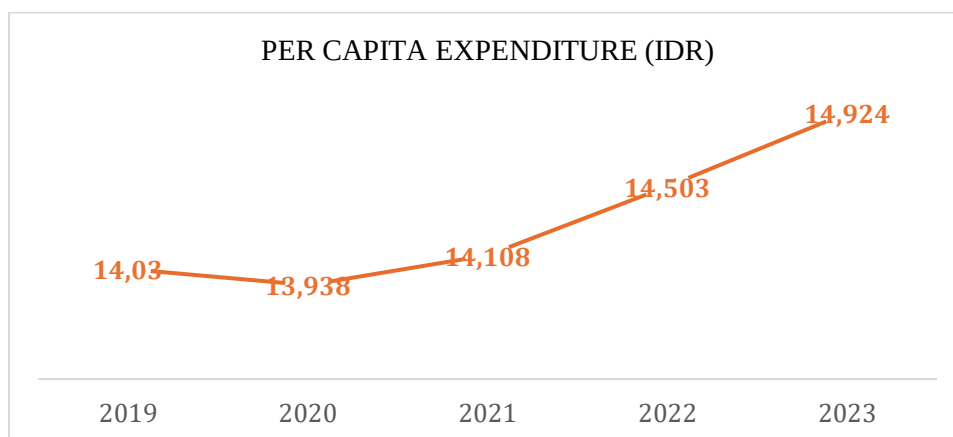


Figure 5. Per Capita Expenditure

Sources: Bengkulu.bps.go.id

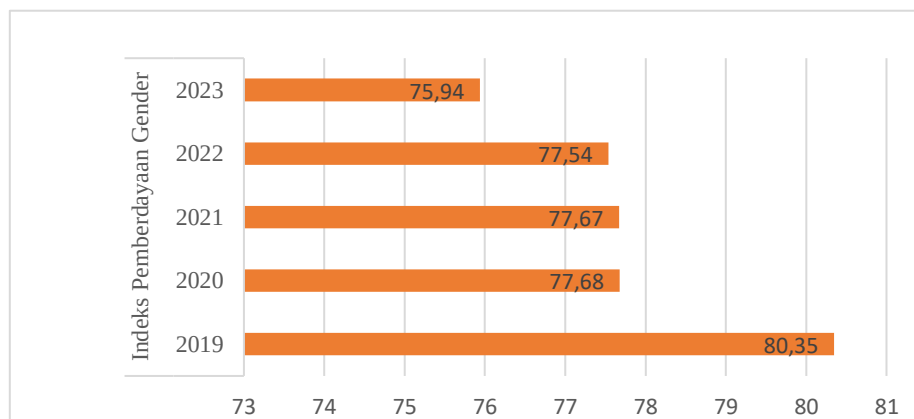
This growth also positioned Bengkulu City above the 2023 provincial average of IDR 11,172 highlighting stronger household purchasing power and relative economic resilience compared to other areas in the province (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023). However, a higher level of per capita expenditure does not necessarily imply gender-equitable access to economic resources. Studies across Indonesian regions show that women's income often contributes significantly to household spending yet remains under-recognized in terms of financial decision-making and asset control (Purwaningsih, 2020; Nurseha, 2024; Ekaputri et al., 2025). In Bengkulu City, while aggregate household expenditure has increased, women's employment remains concentrated in informal and low-paying sectors, which offer limited job security, social protection, and upward mobility. This structural constraint aligns with national trends showing that post-pandemic labor recovery has been slower among women than men, leading to persistent income vulnerability despite higher household consumption (Baird & Dinale, 2025).

Overall, the upward trend in Bengkulu City's per capita expenditure signals improvements in household welfare but not necessarily in women's economic agency. The data suggest that material gains have yet to translate into equitable income control and sustainable empowerment. To ensure that economic growth contributes meaningfully to gender development, policies should target the formalization of women's employment, access to productive credit, and capacity-building for female workers in small and medium enterprises. Such interventions are

essential to transform increased consumption capacity into long-term economic resilience and gender-balanced development—ensuring that the economic dimension of the GDI reflects not only welfare improvements but also structural empowerment for women (Gu, 2024; Ekaputri et al., 2025; Otaokpukpu & Nwankwo, 2024).

The steady improvement of Bengkulu City’s Gender Development Index (GDI) from 2019 to 2023 reflects cumulative progress in women’s fundamental capabilities across the health, education, and economic dimensions. The health dimension, represented by the increase in life expectancy to 74.43 years, indicates effective public health interventions, particularly in maternal and child care, yet the persistence of immunization gaps and health literacy disparities suggests that progress remains uneven. The education dimension demonstrates stronger gender parity, with women achieving higher Mean Years of Schooling 11.77 years and maintaining Expected Years of Schooling around 16 years, showing that educational access and aspirations among women continue to rise. However, these gains in human capital have not been fully translated into equitable labor outcomes. The economic dimension, marked by the increase in per capita expenditure to IDR 14,924 in 2023—surpassing the provincial average of IDR 11,172—reveals improved household welfare but still masks gendered inequalities in income control and employment structure. Collectively, these findings affirm that while Bengkulu City has achieved measurable progress in expanding women’s capabilities, structural and cultural constraints continue to limit the transformation of those capabilities into genuine empowerment. Strengthening institutional mechanisms that bridge capability and agency—through equitable labor policies, gender-sensitive education pathways, and inclusive health systems—is therefore crucial to sustain the upward trajectory of the GDI and to ensure that gender development translates into substantive equality and empowerment for women.

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Empowerment Index (GEI) in Bengkulu City 2019–2023

The measurement of gender equality is not solely represented by the Gender Development Index (GDI) but is also reflected through the Gender Empowerment Index (GEI). The GEI serves to assess the extent of women’s participation and influence across political, economic, and managerial dimensions. This index measures women’s representation in legislative institutions, professional and leadership positions, as well as their contribution to household income (Saputri, 2024). A higher GEI value indicates a stronger level of empowerment and gender equity in decision-making.

Figure 6. GEI of Bengkulu City 2019-2023

Sources: bengkulu.bps.go.id

Based on Figure 6, the GEI of Bengkulu City exhibited a fluctuating trend throughout 2019–2023, characterized by stagnation and decline. The most notable decrease occurred between 2019 and 2020, with a drop of 2.67 points. Although the index remained stable at 77.67 in 2021, it slightly declined again to 77.54 in 2022 and continued to fall to 75.94 in 2023. This downward trajectory indicates that gender empowerment in Bengkulu City has not developed consistently over the observed period, reflecting persistent structural and cultural barriers that limit women’s agency despite improvements in basic capabilities. The stagnation reflects enduring institutional, structural, and cultural challenges that restrict women’s agency and access to decision-making positions.

One of the major factors influencing the GEI is the participation of women in parliament, which signifies their involvement in policy formulation and public decision-making. Such participation is crucial for strengthening gender-sensitive perspectives in public policies related to education, health, and social welfare. The legal foundation for affirmative political action is established through Law No. 12 of 2003 on General Elections, the Law on Political Parties, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). These frameworks stipulate a minimum 30% quota for women’s representation in legislative candidate lists to enhance their participation in governance (Ministry of Women’s Empowerment and Child Protection, 2013). Furthermore, Constitutional Court Decision No. 22–24/PUU-VI/2008 reaffirmed that the open proportional election system may incorporate affirmative measures as a legitimate form of positive discrimination aimed at achieving gender equality (Kurniawan, 2013).

Despite these provisions, the implementation of affirmative action remains suboptimal. As highlighted by Herlambang (2022), political parties often fail to adequately prepare female cadres, treating them primarily as vote mobilizers rather than as potential leaders. Although the 30% quota is often fulfilled during the nomination phase, the proportion of women successfully elected remains below the target due to intense electoral competition and insufficient institutional support, indicating that formal equality has not yet translated into substantive participation.

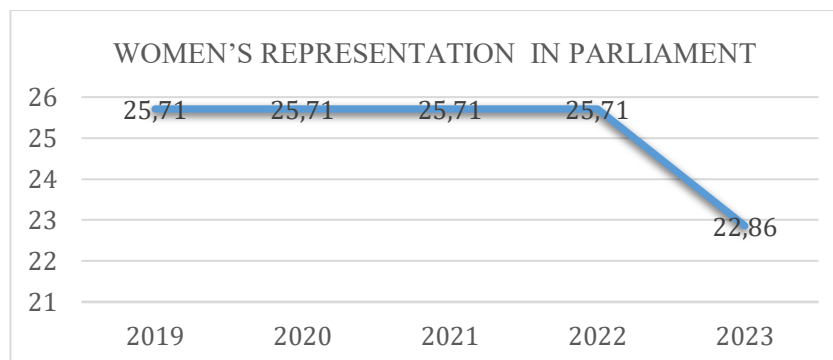


Figure 7. Women’s Representation in the Bengkulu City 2019-2023

Sources: bengkulu.bps.go.id

According to Figure 9, women's representation in the Bengkulu City Parliament was stable at 25.71% between 2019 and 2022 but declined to 22.86% in 2023. Similarly, Table 1 shows that the proportion of female members in the Regional Parliament dropped from 28.57% in 2020 to 25% in 2022, primarily due to the increase in male representation. This underrepresentation limits the integration of gender perspectives into local policy-making processes.

Annastasya (2024) attributes this stagnation to structural constraints within the electoral system, particularly the limited opportunities for interim replacement, which do not significantly alter gender composition in parliament. Moreover, as highlighted by Ramadhan (2024), while solidarity among female legislators and party commitments to women's empowerment provide some support, inadequate budget allocations and low institutional prioritization remain critical barriers. Political recruitment processes that continue to be dominated by male elites further reinforce this imbalance.

Table 1. Proportion of Regional Parliament Female Members in 2020 and 2022

City	2020		2022	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Bengkulu City	5	2	6	2

Sources: Secondary Data, 2025

Therefore, the decline in representation is influenced by local political dynamics and the lack of party commitment to gender-inclusive recruitment (Bincang Perempuan, 2025). Cultural factors also play a major role such as the persistence of patriarchal norms continues to confine women within domestic roles, limiting their participation in the political sphere (Nadia Putri, 2025). The dual burden of household responsibilities and professional demands often discourages women from pursuing political careers. Affirmative strategies, such as assigning women to top positions in candidate lists, have not yielded significant results due to the absence of sustained political cadre development. Public awareness campaigns that emphasize the importance of women's leadership are therefore essential. As argued by Jayani et al. (2024) argue such initiatives can help challenge traditional gender stereotypes, increase voter confidence in female candidates, and foster a cultural transformation that normalizes women's participation in politics.

The 2024 DPD RI election in Bengkulu also illustrates these limitations. As confirmed by the KPU Bengkulu (Radio Republik Indonesia, 2023), political parties retain control over candidate numbering, leaving limited room for women's placement in electable positions. From the Gender and Development (GAD) perspective Mosse (2007), the main obstacle lies not in women's capability but in the persistence of patriarchal political culture that treats women as symbolic participants rather than substantive policymakers. Consequently, the 30% quota functions more as a formal requirement than as a transformative mechanism to achieve gender equality.

Nevertheless, progress is visible in the 2024 DPD RI election, where three women—Elisa Ermasari, Destita Khairilisani, and Leni Haryati—won the highest votes despite not being listed in top ballot positions. This demonstrates a gradual cultural shift and aligns with Moser's (2012) GAD framework, which positions women as active agents and subjects of development. Strengthening political education, leadership training, and gender-responsive recruitment policies could enhance this positive trajectory and translate symbolic representation into substantive empowerment.

Women's contribution to household income is another essential determinant of the GEI, reflecting their economic participation and financial independence. Despite the existence of wage protection under Government Regulation No. 8 of 1981, gender-based income disparities persist due to occupational segregation, limited access to formal employment, and persistent cultural norms that view men as primary breadwinners (Dewi, 2020).

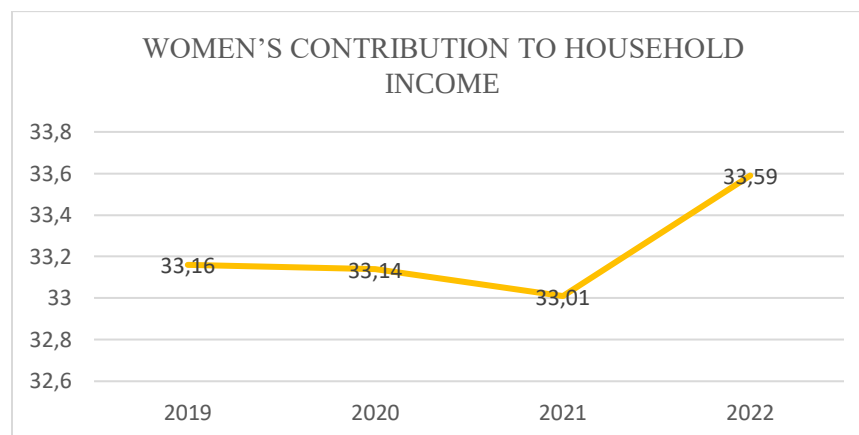


Figure 8. Women's Contribution to Household Income in Bengkulu City 2019-2022

Sources: bengkulu.bps.go.id

Based on Figure 8, women's contribution to household income in Bengkulu City remained relatively stable throughout 2019–2022, fluctuating by less than 1% annually, with a minor decline of 0.15% from 2019 to 2021, followed by an increase of 0.43% in 2022. This stability indicates that while women continue to engage in economic activities, their share in household income has not significantly increased. The persistence of traditional views positioning men as primary breadwinners continues to limit women's access to higher-paying jobs.

The Central Statistics Agency defines female breadwinners as women who contribute the largest share of household income or serve as the sole providers. In Bengkulu City, their proportion remains below the national average (under 14%), yet their economic role is crucial, especially when male household heads are unemployed or earn below subsistence levels. In 2024, self-employed female breadwinners earned an average monthly income of IDR 2,300,000, while those working as wage employees earned slightly less—below the provincial minimum wage of IDR 2,500,000. This disparity underscores the need for inclusive economic policies targeting informal women workers.

This finding differs from Kertati (2021) who reported a decline in women's income contribution in Surakarta due to the migration of female workers from formal to informal sectors. The case of Bengkulu City suggests that while women's participation remains steady, structural constraints—such as limited access to capital, unequal job distribution, and cultural biases—have hindered further progress. Hence, efforts to enhance women's income contribution must involve both economic empowerment programs and sociocultural transformation that challenge traditional gender roles.

From a GAD perspective Moser (2012), the phenomenon of female breadwinners represents a shift in household gender dynamics, where women transition from passive dependents to active economic agents. However, educational inequality persists: more than half of Bengkulu's female breadwinners have only primary education (BPS, 2025). This inverse correlation between education and breadwinner status suggests that lower-educated women are driven into income-generating activities out of necessity, while higher-educated women are more likely to secure stable employment in the formal sector. Therefore, interventions should focus on improving women's access to education, training, and entrepreneurship support to strengthen their role in household and regional economies.

Women's participation in the formal sector represents a crucial indicator of gender empowerment. When women possess self-confidence and independence, they are better positioned to develop their potential, expand their professional networks, and actively engage in decision-making processes. Active involvement in the formal labor market also reflects the professional recognition of women in the workforce, contributing to national development, economic resilience, and the enhancement of human capital quality across individual, familial, and societal levels.

Nevertheless, social and cultural constructions continue to restrict women's roles in the public sphere. Historically, patriarchal norms have positioned women as responsible for domestic affairs, while men dominate public

and economic domains. This dichotomy not only disadvantages women but also perpetuates structural inequality in social role distribution. The internalization of such gender norms still shapes societal perceptions of “appropriate” occupations for women, leading many to be directed toward domestic or informal sector work rather than professional or managerial positions (Yuslin, 2021).

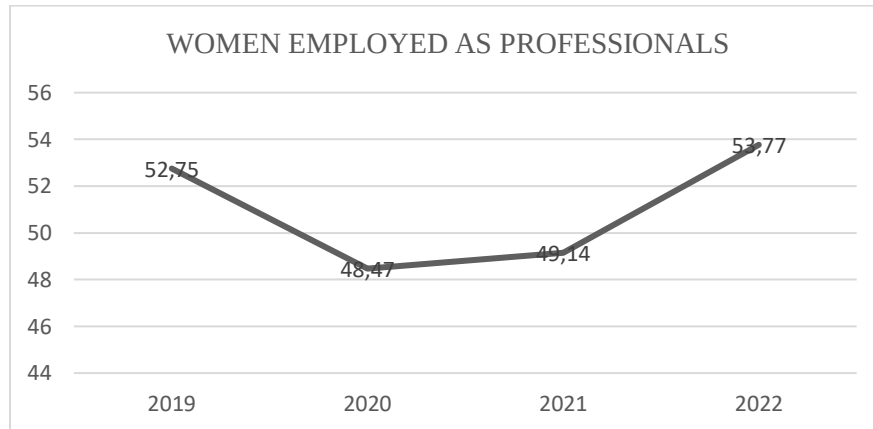


Figure 9. Women Employed as Professionals in Bengkulu City 2019-2022

Sources: bengkulu.bps.go.id

Based on Figure 9, the proportion of women employed as professionals in Bengkulu City declined by 4.28% in 2020 compared with the previous year, largely due to the economic disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this condition gradually improved in subsequent years. In 2022, the percentage of women in professional occupations rose to 53.77%, marking a 4.63% increase from 2021 and surpassing the 2019 level of 52.75%. These data indicate that women in Bengkulu City have successfully adapted and regained their professional roles in the post-pandemic period.

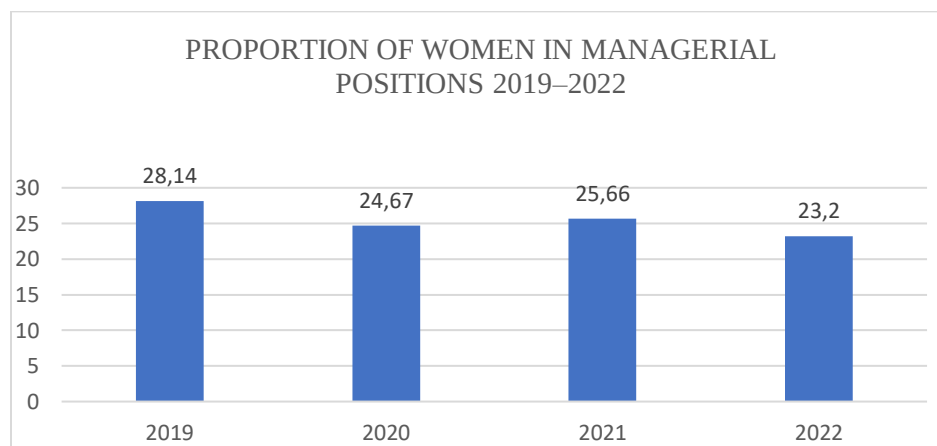


Figure 10. Proportion of Women in Managerial Positions 2019-2022

Sources: bengkulu.bps.go.id

Yet, disparities persist in managerial representation. Between 2019 and 2022, the share of women in managerial positions fluctuated, showing a 3.67% decline in 2020 and a 2.46% drop in 2022. This instability signifies the

persistence of the glass ceiling phenomenon—an invisible barrier preventing women from advancing to senior positions despite equivalent qualifications. Morrison's concept of the glass ceiling, cited in Septiana and Haryanti (2023), attributes this to organizational bias, gender stereotyping, and masculine work cultures that privilege male leadership styles.

Rahmawati, et al (2023) further identify three systemic barriers hindering women's advancement in public institutions: (1) occupational segregation, where women are directed toward administrative or welfare-related roles; (2) masculine organizational culture, which limits access to strategic decision-making; and (3) negative stereotypes of women's leadership, which undermine confidence in their managerial competence. These structural inequalities hinder women's upward mobility and perpetuate gendered hierarchies within both public and private institutions. To dismantle these barriers, gender-sensitive institutional reforms are needed. Policies promoting transparent promotion mechanisms, eliminating job segregation, and offering targeted leadership training can strengthen women's access to managerial and decision-making positions. The GAD framework emphasizes the importance of structural transformation through inclusive, bottom-up approaches that empower women as agents of change (Moser, 2012). Collaborative efforts among government agencies, political parties, and the private sector are therefore crucial to promoting gender equality in the workplace and ensuring that women's empowerment contributes meaningfully to institutional performance and governance quality.

Overall, the trajectory of the Gender Empowerment Index (GEI) in Bengkulu City from 2019 to 2023 reflects a multidimensional paradox: while women's basic capabilities have improved, their empowerment in political, economic, and professional domains remains constrained by structural and cultural factors. Political representation continues to fall short of the 30% quota due to institutional and patriarchal barriers. Economically, women's contribution to household income remains steady but limited by informal employment and low education levels. Professionally, women's participation in the formal sector has rebounded post-pandemic, yet access to managerial positions remains hindered by systemic gender bias and workplace discrimination.

Hence, sustainable gender empowerment in Bengkulu City requires an integrated policy approach that links gender-responsive political participation, equitable economic opportunities, and inclusive institutional cultures. Strengthening gender mainstreaming across public and private sectors, enhancing leadership training, and ensuring enforcement of anti-discrimination laws are essential to transforming women's potential into genuine empowerment. Only through such systemic reform can Bengkulu City translate its progress in gender development into tangible, equitable empowerment outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that gender development in Bengkulu City improved moderately during 2019–2023, as reflected by the increase in the Gender Development Index (GDI) from 95.97 to 96.12. The rise in life expectancy, educational attainment, and per capita expenditure demonstrates progress in women's basic capabilities in health, education, and economic welfare. However, the Gender Empowerment Index (GEI) exhibited a declining trend—from 80.35 in 2019 to 75.94 in 2023—indicating that greater capability has not yet translated into stronger agency. Limited women's representation in parliament, wage disparities, and unequal access to managerial positions remain key constraints. These findings affirm the Gender and Development (GAD) perspective that structural and cultural barriers continue to inhibit women's participation in decision-making despite measurable gains in human development.

To strengthen gender equality, local governments should integrate capacity-building with empowerment-oriented interventions. Political institutions must ensure that the 30% representation quota results in substantive participation, supported by leadership training and gender-sensitive recruitment. Economic programs should focus on enhancing women's access to formal employment, entrepreneurial financing, and skill development in high-value sectors. Furthermore, workplace reforms—such as flexible arrangements, childcare support, and anti-discrimination enforcement—are crucial to dismantle systemic barriers. Future research should adopt longitudinal and intersectional

approaches to capture causal dynamics between capability and empowerment at the local level, ensuring that improvements in GDI are effectively converted into sustainable gender empowerment.

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