

Inefficiency of Social Assistance in Reducing Poverty Rates: Recommendations for Alternative Social Policies for Poverty Alleviation in Indonesia

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Abstract

This article discusses the inefficiency of social assistance (bantuan sosial/bansos) policies in poverty alleviation in Indonesia. It is often emphasized that the Promising Families Program (PKH) and Direct Cash Transfer (BLT) are the main instruments of social assistance for short-term poverty reduction, especially in crises. However, their effectiveness remains debatable due to the dominance of political factors in their distribution. This study analyzes the inefficiency of social assistance in reducing poverty using a mixed methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative analysis of state budget and poverty data. The findings indicated that social assistance allocations tend to increase before elections without significantly reducing poverty rates. Lag regression analysis showed that the dominant factor influencing poverty is the previous year's poverty level, while the direct impact of social assistance on poverty reduction is not statistically significant. This study recommends a shift in social policy paradigms through the Growth, Empowerment, Adaptability, and Rationality (GEAR) policy model, which emphasizes economic growth, community empowerment, policy adaptability to social changes, and rational and sustainable resource distribution.

Keywords: *GEAR policy model, poverty alleviation, social policy, social assistance*

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INTRODUCTION

Social assistance or social aid (*bantuan sosial/bansos*), which is a payment scheme from the government to the people (G2P), is one of the most important instruments of social welfare policy in Indonesia. This is attributable to a number of factors, including close relationships with social, political, and economic dynamics that shape the structure of public policy; ease of implementation in poverty alleviation through direct, positive impact on the social welfare of beneficiaries, especially during emergencies (Datta et al., 2014); and limited alternative policy instruments that are as effective in addressing poverty. Social assistance is also considered a practical redistribution tool in mitigating social inequality (Datta, Febriany, & Susilas-tuti, 2014). However, questions are being asked about the real motives and effectiveness of social assistance programs. While social assistance policies in Indonesia since the 1997-1999 Asian economic crisis and subsequent reformation have become an integral part of Indonesia's socio-economic development strategy (Teguh, 2012), the motivations and hence effectiveness of its use have aroused doubts. The size and frequency of the use of social assistance increases drastically in the lead-up to and during elections, and its use to cultivate and strengthen political loyalty (Kwon & Kim, 2015; Widjaja, 2012; Haliim et al., 2024) has led many to question the motivation and effectiveness in reducing poverty and income inequality. To that end, it is highly doubtful whether social assistance, in the forms it takes and its timing, is effective in achieving its intended goals of reducing poverty and income inequality.

The Ministry of Finance's 2025 Financial Note and the 2025 Draft State Budget state that the planning of social assistance budgets provided to the poor and vulnerable requires a budget of 147 trillion IDR. This amount takes up at least 55 percent of the social protection budget (Sujoko, 2024). Social assistance programs such as the PKH, BLT, and the Healthy Indonesia Card (KIS) aim to provide protection to vulnerable groups, especially during times of an economic crisis or pandemic. Social welfare policy in Indonesia is in essence a payment

scheme from the government to the people (G2P). The form of G2P implementation includes salaries, pensions, incentives, subsidies, and social assistance (bansos). In its implementation, G2P is often dominated by social assistance in the context of poverty alleviation.

However, the use of social assistance often has a political dimension. Several studies have shown that social assistance is used as a tool to gain political support, especially during election campaigns. For example, Widjaja (2012) highlights how the distribution of social assistance can increase the popularity of regional or national leaders.

This argument is supported by the fact that from a budget perspective, social assistance is often seen as an efficient policy because it directly reaches groups of poor people. Programs such as Direct Cash Transfer (BLT) are designed to provide an economic stimulus effect while reducing the financial burden on poor households. However, this program often draws criticism regarding its impact on people's dependence on state assistance (Warr, 2005). Although dominant, social assistance is often criticized for failing to address the root causes of poverty. Dhanani & Islam (2002) stated that social programs are often reactive and do not address structural issues such as access to education, employment, and agrarian reform. People's dependence on social assistance is also a debated issue.

Yuda (2023) conducted a study that showed that social assistance in Indonesia, especially cash assistance, is often used by elites to strengthen their power. This is clearly seen during times of crisis, when social assistance is provided with the narrative that the government is helping vulnerable communities. This strategy creates political loyalty among aid recipients. This is in line with the study by Kwon, H., & Kim, W. (2015), which highlighted that social assistance is often used by the Indonesian government as a tool to increase the popularity of incumbents during the election period. This is a political tactic to attract the sympathy of voters in poor areas, with the distribution of social assistance focused on electorally strategic areas.

Table 1: Comparison between APBN (State Budget) and Social Assistance Allocation 2012-2023

Year	APBN in Trillions of IDR (1)	Social Asst. Allocation in Trillions of IDR (2)
2012	1311.4	47.77
2013	1529.7	73.6
2014	1667.1	484.1
2015	1793.6	276.2
2016	1822.5	215
2017	1750.3	216.6
2018	1894.7	293.8
2019	2165.1	308.4
2020	2233.3	498
2021	1743.6	468.2
2022	2635.8	460.6
2023	2443	439.1

Source: APBN and Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS), 2012-2023

Putra and Aminuddin (2020) also conducted a study that showed that regional heads use social assistance programs to strengthen their power through political networks at the local level. This practice involves manipulating the distribution of social assistance to benefit certain support groups. Dhani (2013) revealed in his research that social assistance distribution reform in the era of decentralization often creates space for the politicization of social assistance, where distribution is carried out based on the political interests of local elites.

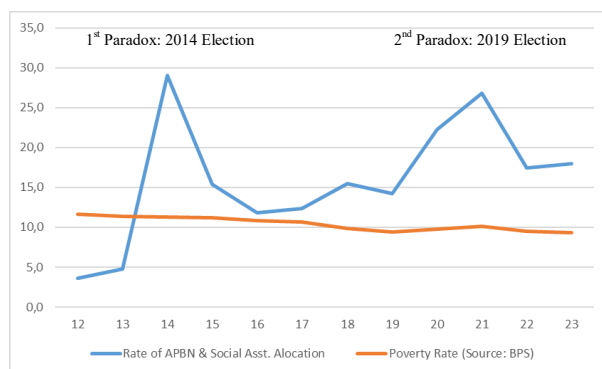


Figure 1: The paradox of social assistance allocation compared to poverty in Indonesia in 2012-2023

Source: APBN and Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS), 2021-2023

Table 1 and Figure 1 shows that there is a paradox in the allocation of social assistance ahead of election years (2014 and 2019). This proves that social assistance is used as a political tool by the authorities to perpetuate their power. Comparison of the percentage of the State Budget (APBN) with the Allocation of Social Assistance and the percentage of poverty in Indonesia from 2012 to 2023 provides the information that social assistance is considered ineffective in solving poverty problems.

Blunt, Turner, & Lindroth (2012) and Wilmsen & Sumarto (2017) saw, noted, and documented that programs such as *Beras Miskin* (Raskin, "Poor Rice") and BLT are often used as tools to gain political support and build political patronage between elites and constituents in the distribution of social assistance, especially in the run-up to elections. In the reform era, such practices still occur. Saragintan & Hidayat (2016) revealed a tendency for the allocation of grant funds and social assistance to be used as a political strategy by targeting strong supporters of the incumbent and several influential religious groups. In addition, Haliim (2020) also explained that the management of grant funds and social assistance in Indonesia after the reformation was still vulnerable to corrupt

behavior by political elites.

Based on the quantitative data and explanation of the literature review above, the research objective is to conduct a regression test that produces an exponential trend in the allocation of social assistance and poverty. This would be supported by qualitative data from interviews with informants to prove that the social assistance disbursed by the state is not effective in reducing poverty rates, which is the state of the art of this study. Given that other studies have not discussed much about the efficiency of social assistance in reducing poverty rates in Indonesia, this study also offers a new model that is expected to be a new reference for the state to manage social assistance properly.

METHOD

The mixed methods research approach combines quantitative and qualitative methods to gain a more comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon. In the study of the effectiveness of social assistance in reducing poverty in Indonesia, this method enabled the analysis of quantitative data on budget policies and their impact on poverty rates as well as the exploration of the qualitative experiences of aid recipients. As explained by Creswell & Clark (2017), mixed methods are beneficial in explaining complex cause-and-effect relationships in social policies, especially when political and social factors cannot be fully captured by numerical data alone. The mixed methods approach in this study provides advantages by comparing quantitative results with deeper social perspectives. For instance, lagged regression analysis results indicated that increased social assistance funding does not always correlate with a significant reduction in poverty. However, through interviews with beneficiaries, it was found that many still depend on social assistance due to a lack of access to stable employment.

The utilized quantitative method was lagged regression. Regression analysis is a statistical method used to determine the relationship pattern between a dependent variable (response) and one or more independent variables (predictors) (Zulheri et al., 2019). One common approach to modeling regres-

sion is the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) method, which estimates classical regression coefficients by minimizing the sum of squared errors (Zulheri et al., 2019). Meanwhile, lagged regression is a statistical approach that uses past values of a variable as predictors in a regression model to forecast its future values (Powell et al., 2023; Moews et al., 2019). This method is particularly useful in time series analysis, where temporal dependence between observations is a key consideration. By incorporating lagged values (past-period observations), the regression model can better capture dynamic relationships in the data, which are often influenced by historical trends or events (Powell et al., 2023; Moews et al., 2019).

The inclusion of a lagged dependent variable in OLS regression is frequently employed to account for dynamic effects in political or economic processes (Keele & Kelly, 2006). This approach remains a valid model for testing dynamic theories in empirical research (Keele & Kelly, 2006). Thus, lagged variables can help predict future values of the dependent variable based on its own past values (e.g., Y_{t-1}) or those of independent variables. This technique is widely used in time series modeling, where historical values of the dependent variable are expected to influence future outcomes significantly (Powell et al., 2023; Keele & Kelly, 2006).

By using a quasi-explanatory approach, this study utilized statistical data on social assistance allocations from APBN and poverty rates (quantitative analysis) alongside in-depth interviews with beneficiaries to understand its social impact (qualitative analysis). Researchers may choose flexible or "customized" designs, including quasi-exploratory and explanatory, by comparing findings from different data sources, such as government reports, beneficiary interviews, academic analyses, or literature study (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Thus, the mixed methods approach not only provided a more comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of social assistance in poverty reduction but also helped to identify structural factors that hinder the success of these programs.

This approach aligns with Bryman

(2012), who emphasizes that qualitative data in mixed methods can fill gaps in the interpretation of quantitative findings. Thus, this study not only reveals the inefficacy of social assistance from a statistical perspective but also uncovers the socio-political dynamics that contribute to public dependence on government aid. For this purpose, the final part of this article's discussion then offers a model that the government can use as a reference in order to provide the right paradigm for social assistance management for its intended outputs. After conducting a mixed analysis of quantitative and qualitative data to verify the inefficiency of social assistance, the model is offered as an effort to improve social policies as well as the quality of human resources receiving social assistance.

RESULTS

Inefficiency of Social Assistance

Lorem In the Indonesian political system, the distribution of social assistance is often used as a mechanism of political control by central and local elites. This makes social assistance a tool that is too "valuable" for the authorities to be released voluntarily. On the other hand, the data below proves that the trend of increasing social assistance allocations has not had a significant effect on reducing poverty. This is exacerbated by the mentality of the poor who consider social assistance to be a "bonus", which they use

not for primary needs but for tertiary needs (Haliim & Hakim, 2024). The power relations between actors who have political interests in social assistance (PKH, as an example), and the poor with their mentality as explained earlier actually form a patron-client relationship (Haliim, Ferdiansyah, Sari, 2024). Analysis using exponential trend analysis and lag regression increasingly shows that social assistance is considered ineffective in alleviating poverty.

Two aspects can be explained in Figure 2. The first is the relationship between social assistance and poverty. Increased social assistance is not always followed by significant reductions in poverty. For example, the large increases in social assistance in 2014 and 2021 did not result in sharp changes in poverty trends. On the contrary, poverty tends to decline gradually even though fluctuations in social assistance are quite large. The second is exponential trends in social assistance and poverty. The green line shows an exponential trend of increasing social assistance, but because $R^2 = 0.2091$, the relationship is not strong enough to explain the data pattern. This shows that the pattern of social assistance allocation issued by the state is inconsistent and very strongly politically charged. The R^2 value of 0.8677 shows that the exponential trend of poverty strongly explains the data pattern. This means that

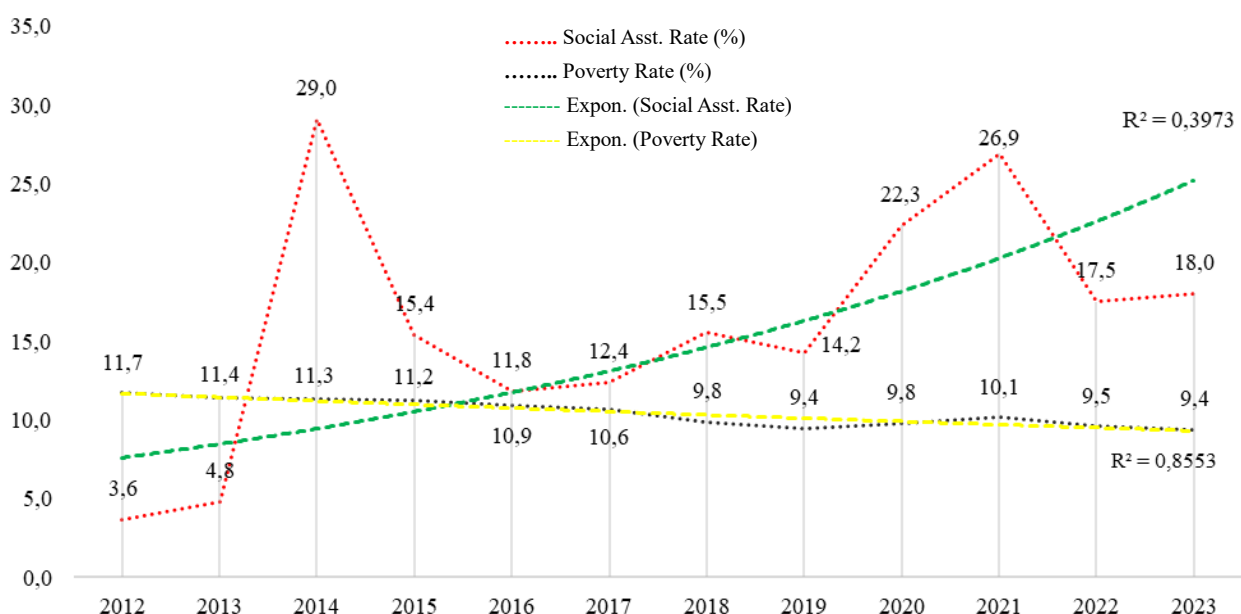


Figure 2: Exponential Trends of Social Assistance Allocation and Poverty

Source: APBN & poverty rate data processed by researchers, 2021-2023

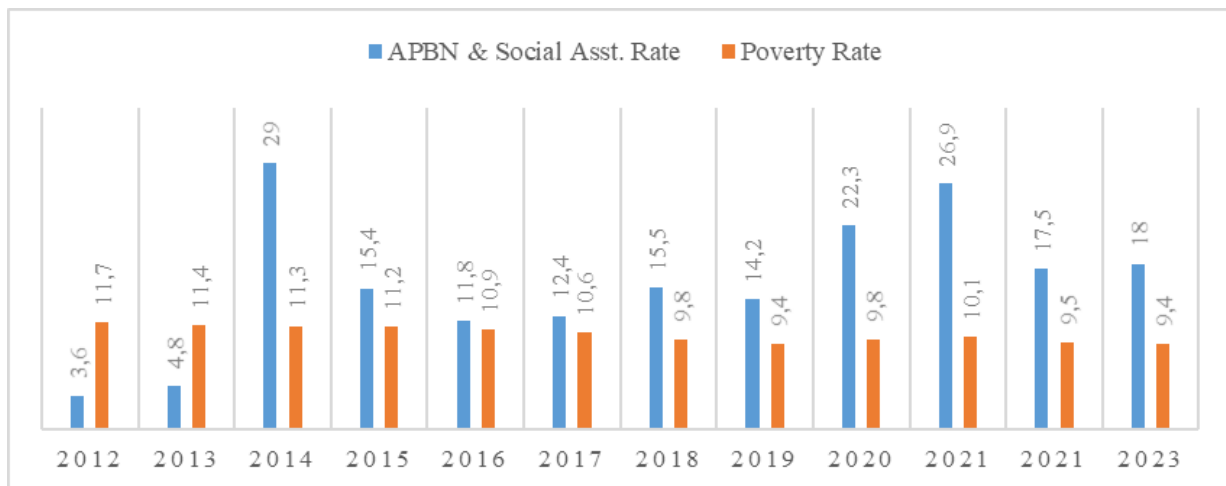


Figure 3: Trend of APBN & Social Assistance Rate and Poverty Rate (2012-2023)

Source: APBN & poverty rate data processed by researchers, 2021-2023

Table 2: Lag Regression Results of the Impact of Social Assistance on Poverty

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t	P > t	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
(Constant)	-0.0280	1.576	-0.018	0.986	-3.662	3.606
Social Assistance Rate	0.0238	0.016	1.453	0.184	-0.014	0.062
Poverty Lag	0.9441	0.137	6.892	0.000	0.628	1.260

Note: Dep. Variable: Poverty Rate; **R-squared: 0.861**; Adj. R-squared: 0.826; Method: Least Squares; **F-statistic: 24.70**; Prob (F-statistic): 0.000377; No. Observations: 11; Df Residuals: 8; Df Model: 2; Covariance Type: nonrobust; Omnibus: 0.967 (Prob(Omnibus): 0.617); Durbin-Watson: 2.046; Jarque-Bera (JB): 0.710 (Prob(JB): 0.701); Skew: -0.541; Kurtosis: 2.385; Cond. No. 331

Source: Data processing by researchers using R-studio

the exponential model is quite accurate in describing the decline in poverty from year to year, but not significantly. It is said to be insignificant because the average percentage increase in social assistance allocation of 1.3% per year is not balanced by a decrease in poverty of only 0.2% per year. The problem of social assistance allocation, with its significant jump in figures, also occurred in the approach to and after the electoral and political moments of 2014 and 2019.

The lag regression results (refer to Figure 3 and Table 2) reveal that the model explains approximately 86.1% of the variability in poverty, as indicated by the R-squared value of 0.861. The coefficient for the Social Assistance Rate is 0.0238 with a p-value of 0.184, suggesting that its direct effect on poverty reduction is not statistically significant at the 5% level. Conversely, the coefficient for Poverty Lag is 0.9441 with a p-value < 0.0001, indicating a strong and statistically significant influence of past poverty levels on current poverty conditions.

Furthermore, the F-statistic of 24.70 ($p = 0.000377$) confirms that the overall model is statistically significant.

The dominance of the Poverty Lag variable, with a coefficient approaching 1, demonstrates the inherent persistence of poverty over time. This suggests that a significant portion of current poverty levels can be attributed to poverty experienced in the preceding period. In contrast, the relatively small and statistically insignificant effect of social assistance implies that such programs, in their current form, may not be sufficiently impactful in directly reducing poverty. These results indicate that social assistance, despite its aim, does not contribute significantly to poverty reduction. Therefore, this finding underlines the importance of improving the effectiveness and targeting of social assistance policies, requiring an in-depth evaluation to ensure the rationality of allocation and to result in measurable impacts in reducing poverty sustainably. Lastly, the Durbin-Watson statistic of approximately 2.046 sug-

Table 3: Perception of the Impact of DBHCHT Policy Based on Actor Type

Actor	Negative Perception (%)	Positive Perception (%)
Farmers/BLT recipients	71.52	28.48
Cigarette factories	16.58	83.42
Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)	72.64	27.36
Middlemen (<i>Tengkulak</i>)	21.51	78.49

Source: Interview Results and NVivo Analysis

gests no serious autocorrelation issue in the model, indicating that the residuals are independent.

Negative perception about social assistance programs

Many managers and recipients have the view that social assistance in Indonesia is only to help their daily lives. Two examples of BLT social policy were taken to supplement this study: the Promising Families Program (PKH, Program Keluarga Harapan) in Malang Regency and the BLT of Tobacco Excise Tax Revenue Sharing (DBHCHT, Dana Bagi Hasil Cukai Hasil Tembakau) in Gunungkidul Regency. According to the results of the interview with Lasiem (a representative and one of the PKH recipients in Malang Regency), the PKH BLT was only enough to meet their basic needs. Syiwal (a representative of poor farmers and one of the recipients of the DBHCHT BLT in Gunungkidul Regency) said that he did not know when he would receive the BLT. He admitted that the call to go to the village office for this purpose was sudden and random, and the amount he received was always different. Regarding the implementation of BLT as a part of the DBHCHT policy, analysis re-

vealed that BLT recipients (farmers) actually have a negative perception. The following table 3 illustrates the explanation.

With consideration of previous studies on the dependence of social assistance recipients (Haliim & Hakim, 2024), the existence of power relations in the implementation of social assistance (Haliim, Ferdiansyah, & Sari, 2024) and bureaucratic problems in the process of implementing social assistance (Haliim & Purba, 2023), it is further emphasized that new alternatives are needed in changing the paradigm of social assistance policies.

Dependence of society on social assistance

The dependence of society on social assistance, especially in poor areas, strengthens the position of the elite in using social assistance for political legitimacy. Without fundamental changes in the economic structure, society will continue to depend on social assistance, strengthening the patronage cycle. The implementation of social assistance in Indonesia is often not transparent (Syahadat *et al.*, 2025). Unsupervised distribution mechanisms allow elites to control who receives assistance, thus reducing the

Table 4: Linearization of Regional Election Voting Results with the Increase or Decrease in Average Received Amounts of PKH Social Assistance

Voting Results for the 2020 Malang Regency Election				Average Received Amount of PKH Social Assistance		
Sub-District	C1	C2	C3	2018	2021	Status
Dampit	26731	24739	4955	3047.5	4390.667	↑ (Increase)
Jabung	13042	17509	3176	3535.5	3463.333	↓ (Decrease)
Karangploso	13938	16202	3847	1866.75	1833.667	↓ (Decrease)
Singosari	25646	29846	4189	2676	2027.667	↓ (Decrease)
Tajinan	11755	11720	2875	2243.75	2472.333	↑ (Increase)

Source: General Election Commission and Malang Regency Social Services, 2018-2021

probability of reform without external intervention. An example of this occurred in Malang Regency (see Table 4), where a power relationship emerged in the implementation of PKH related to the 2020 Malang Regency Regional Election. A sub-district that was won by the incumbent (as Candidate 1 or C1) led to an increase in the average received amount. Meanwhile, one that was won by an opposing candidate (as Candidate 2 or C2) led to a decrease in the amount. The following table illustrates the situation:

DISCUSSION

The Importance of Alternative Social Policy Models for Poverty Alleviation

New, alternative models of social policy related to social assistance are indeed very much needed. Therefore, the next step and idea for this study is to formulate a Universal Basic Income (UBI) that can replace social assistance by providing an unconditional basic income for all citizens.

The implementation of UBI is expected to eliminate the transactional element in the distribution of social assistance and ensure that everyone benefits, regardless of their social status (Datta et al., 2014). It will be a supporting variable for the development of social infrastructure, such as affordable education and health services, which can be a long-term solution to poverty alleviation. This policy focuses resources on human capacity development rather than providing direct cash assistance (Utomo et al., 2023). A social policy for poverty alleviation needs to consider vocational training and work incentives in order to be able to create more competent workforce and increase employment opportunities.

This takes into consideration that the average unemployment rate in Indonesia after the pandemic has not decreased significantly compared to unemployment before the pandemic. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, unemployment was 3.62% (2019) before increasing to 4.41% (2021); the average unemployment during the COVID-19 pandemic was 6.49% (August 2021) to 4.91% (August 2024) (Sujito & Bahagijo, 2022; BPS, 2024). Incentives for companies to hire workers from poor families are also an effective alternative (Calista et al., 2024).

It is important to redesign the social protection program, as social security for aid recipients is not only short-term but also long-term. Social protection programs should be redesigned according to long-term needs, such as improving food security and access to housing. These programs must create systems that are not easily politicized (Tambunan & Purwoko, 2002).

Next, the use of data for transparency and efficiency must also be taken seriously. Utilization of digital technology and big data for aid distribution can increase efficiency and reduce opportunities for corruption or politicization of social assistance (Sumarto et al., 2018). Of course, the above approach requires prerequisites that are not easy. These prerequisites include community participation in the design and implementation of social policies, which would ensure that programs are truly relevant to local needs (Purohit et al., 2025). This also helps create a sense of ownership and reduces dependence on the government. Then, a campaign to increase public understanding of social policies and their long-term impacts can help encourage public accountability. Public awareness of the dangers of politicizing social assistance needs to be strengthened through the media and education. Thus, the need for political parties or leaders who prioritize social reform can be a catalyst for the creation of more sustainable policies (Pathak, 2025).

Social policies should have digital transparency and accountable decentralization. This may be achieved through digital technology based on big data and blockchain to record and verify the distribution of social assistance (Norta et al., 2025). This system will reduce the possibility of manipulation by the elite because the data is available to the public. A study by Sumarto (2018) shows how digital data can improve accountability in aid distribution. This condition must be supported by redistribution of authority through policy reform. This also means separating the authority for distributing social assistance from direct political authority, for example by handing over its implementation to an independent institution. The establishment of an autonomous institution for managing social assistance

that is subject to a public and independent audit mechanism is also needed (Bilan et al., 2025).

If the principles of transparency and accountability are not upheld in its implementation, social assistance will be vulnerable to actors with political interests. Reflecting on the experience of the 2020 Malang Regency Regional Election, actors such as Amir (a local political actor from Tajinan Sub-District) emerged, who took advantage of the loopholes in PKH implementation to gain power in regulating and mobilizing the votes of PKH recipients. Amir explained that he promised poor people who were potential PKH recipients that 'if they voted for candidates supported by Amir, they would be made future PKH recipients'. The presence of such actors shows that the authorities of implementation are still not working effectively to enforce the implementation of existing policies.

External factors such as court and legal reform as a control mechanism must also be taken seriously. This would allow the establishment of stricter legal sanctions against the misuse of social assistance for political interests. Institutions such as the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) need to be involved to monitor cases of social assistance politicization. On the other hand, political system reform must also be carried out. In the previous explanation, it is already known that political domination is very strong in the implementation of social policy, which actually prevents policy objectives from being achieved. The relationship between social assistance and political campaigns is difficult to resolve without changes in election regulations (Syahadat et al., 2025). Therefore, it is necessary to implement regulations that prohibit the use of social assistance programs as campaign tools, with strict enforcement through election monitoring institutions.

Strengthening accountability mechanisms is aimed at eliminating transactional populist policies. Politicization of social assistance often occurs because leaders rely on this program to gain popularity (Locatelli et al., 2023). Alternative policies such as universal basic income (UBI) – which provides an unconditional basic income to all citizens

– can be a major step towards reducing direct political influence over aid distribution. This UBI system can be supported by the reduction of energy subsidies or other programs to divert funds to long-term policies, as well as a direct distribution system through bank accounts to reduce third-party intervention (Siqueira & Nogueira, 2023). Support for institutional reform of political parties must also be continuously increased. Elite dominance over social policy can be minimized through the creation of political parties with a social reform agenda. These parties must prioritize long-term programs such as education, health, and job creation, not just direct assistance. Thus, through assistance from external parties, the public can recognize that what is important from social programs is not just direct cash assistance (McIntosh & Zeitlin, 2024).

The main goal is to change the mindset of poor people through social campaigns. The community's dependence on social assistance is often driven by the mindset that the state is a provider of instant solutions (Sucasaca et al., 2024). Social campaigns that focus on independence, local innovation, and shared responsibility can change this perception. This campaign can be promoted through the media, schools, and community activities. What is to be expected from the campaign is the emergence of social leadership at the community level that can be a driver of change. Social program services managed by community leaders, rather than government officials, allow for a more equitable and responsive approach to community needs (Garcia et al., 2025).

Changes in social policy that are aimed at reducing dependence on social assistance require strong political support, public awareness, and a commitment to improving governance (Lind, 2022). However, the biggest challenge is resistance from elites who have lost their influence over this policy (Bhanot & Hopkins, 2020). Therefore, this approach needs to be accompanied by political education for the community to increase their critical thinking towards the politicization of social assistance. The explanation above touches on the core of the structural challenges in social policy in Indonesia. In the context of social assistance (bansos)

which has become a dominant political tool, breaking elite dominance requires a strategy that is not only technical but also political and sociological.

Introducing The GEAR (Growth, Empowerment, Adaptability, And Rationality) Policy Model

The research was then focused on the development of a social policy model for the social policy program, with the objective of enabling the poor to achieve economic independence and escape poverty. This model was inspired by the Australian Cycle policy model and the implementation of the Bolsa Escola/Familia program in Brazil. The social policy model is called GEAR (Growth, Empowerment, Adaptability, and Rationality) (see Figure 4). The background of this policy model is that social policy is present to provide solutions to social problems in countries that are highly dependent on social assistance (Prianto & M. Sulhan, 2021). The GEAR social policy model is oriented towards results without neglecting important processes, allowing the poor to become fully independent. This model also takes into account the importance of the function and role of bureaucracy, which will protect them from political intervention.

The following is the explanation of the concepts from the GEAR (Growth, Empowerment, Adaptability, and Rationality) social policy model that can be implemented to

overcome bureaucratic, social, and political intervention problems that may exist in poverty alleviation programs in Indonesia.

1. Growth

Economic growth is often seen as an indicator of a country's success in improving the welfare of its people. Based on the references, it is agreed that the government is a central actor that is considered to have a major responsibility for ensuring full employment, economic growth, and social welfare (Airlangga, 2024). What follows is an exploration of the importance of economic growth for the poor and the way that sustainable economic development can be a tool for achieving social equity and shared prosperity. One of the direct impacts of economic growth is the creation of more job opportunities. The poor often have limited access to decent jobs and stable incomes. With economic growth, sectors such as industry, services, and agriculture can grow sustainably and create new jobs. This provides opportunities for the poor to improve their standard of living through decent work and stable income (Aerni, Stravridou, & Schuep, 2021).

Economic growth also allows governments to invest more funds in infrastructure development and the provision of basic services. Good infrastructure, such as efficient transportation networks, affordable health systems, and quality education, can provide direct benefits to the poor (Abidin, 2015).

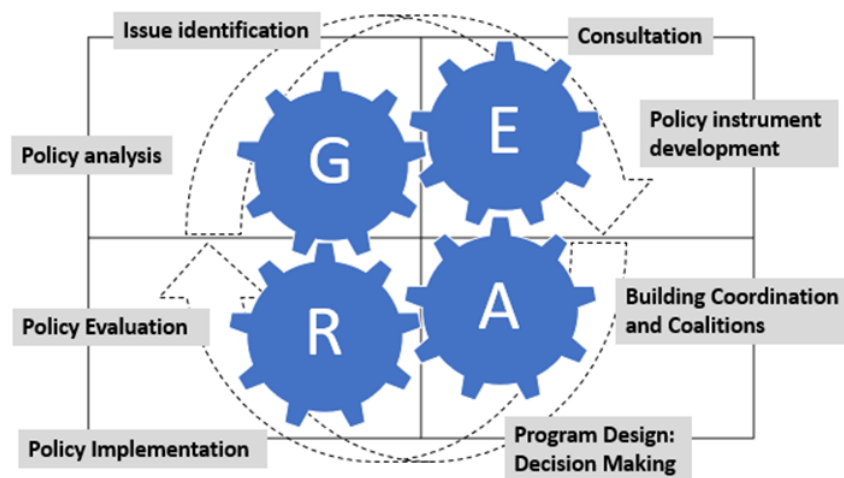


Figure 4: GEAR Social Policy Model

Source: Developed by researchers

With better access to these facilities, people can improve their quality of life and gain easier access to economic opportunities.

One of the main criticisms of economic growth is the unequal distribution of income (Saipudin, 2024). However, if it proceeds wisely, economic growth can provide additional resources for governments to implement policies that support a more equitable distribution of income. The increased incomes of people resulting from economic growth can be used to support social programs such as assistance to poor families, educational scholarships, and affordable health care (Imah et al., 2024)).

Economic growth encourages entrepreneurship and innovation. With a conducive business climate, many individuals of various backgrounds, including the poor, can be inspired to start their own businesses. This entrepreneurship not only creates additional jobs but also increases overall productivity (Gaur, 2024). The poor who engage in these economic activities can experience increased income and economic independence. However, in the case of PKH, according to a trace of existing data, only 3.6 percent of business owners in graduate households (RTG, Rumah Tangga Graduasi) reported having received entrepreneurial/vocational skills training in the period from 2016-2020.

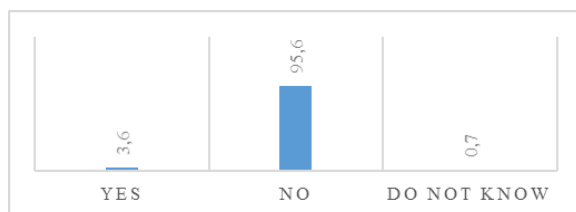


Figure 5: Business Owners in RTG Who Received Training, 2016-2020 (%)

Source: Syamsulhakim and Khadijah, 2021

Here, “graduate” means having ended participation in PKH as a beneficiary (KPM) because of achieving independence and being no longer in need of social assistance. The fact that 95.6% of graduated households had not received business training is regrettable, as the problem of poverty cannot only be considered solved at the time KPM beneficiaries achieve independence. Resilience factors that allow their independence, such as work and income, must also be considered. This is proof that the PKH social poli-

cy model does not have the paradigm of growth in solving poverty.

The paradigm of growth is very important as an effort to solve poverty. Examples of implementation include ensuring better education and health opportunities, access to decent jobs, and more equitable income distribution, all of which can lead to improved welfare for the poor. It is not just about increasing income but also improving the overall quality of life (Fernandes et al., 2024).

The importance of economic growth for the poor cannot be overstated. However, to achieve real benefits, economic growth must be accompanied by policies that support inclusiveness and equitable distribution. Governments, the private sector, and civil society need to work together to create an equitable and sustainable economic environment (Graver, Mattingly, & Wial, 2023). It is important to understand that economic growth is not an end in itself, but a means to a more equitable and sustainable society. By ensuring that economic growth is directed towards empowering those at the lower end of society, it is possible to shape a better future for everyone. Inclusive economic development will thus be the foundation for realizing the vision of shared prosperity for all citizens (Nurfaisah, 2025).

2. Empowerment

Empowering the poor is key to creating a just and sustainable society. Empowerment is not just about providing temporary assistance or aid, but also about providing the tools and knowledge needed to achieve economic independence (Ates *et al.*, 2025). What follows is the discussion regarding the importance of empowering the poor with the aim of achieving economic independence, and how empowerment measures can change their social and economic realities.

Education plays a major role in empowering the poor. By equipping the poor with the necessary knowledge and skills, they can access better economic opportunities (Candra *et al.*, 2025). Affordable and high-quality education programs can provide a strong foundation for the poor to overcome challenges and compete in the job market. Education also opens insights and helps

them recognize their potential, but also provides opportunities for better career development (Rahmat & Mirnawati, 2020).

In addition to formal education, skill training is also a key element in empowering the poor. The provision of skill training that is tailored to the needs of the local labor market can help them obtain better jobs or even start their own businesses (Ajao & Ogunlela, 2025). Skills such as for food processing, handicrafts, or information technology can add value to the poor, increasing their competitiveness in an increasingly competitive labor market.

One of the main obstacles faced by the poor is the lack of access to capital assistance and credit. Without adequate capital assistance, it is difficult for them to start or grow their own businesses. Microfinance programs and inclusive financial institutions can provide access to those who do not have collateral or a good credit history (Syariah *et al.*, 2023). Thus, the poor can use their capital assistance and credit to start or grow their businesses, opening opportunities for sustainable economic growth. For example, for graduate households from PKH, only a few of them received business assistance or credit; many of them were then affected by the economic shocks in 2020.

Empowering the poor also involves supporting the development of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). MSMEs play a vital role in the economy, creating jobs and contributing to local economic growth. Governments and private institutions can provide support in the form of training, funding and market access for poor business owners. In this way, MSMEs owned by the poor can grow and develop, significantly increasing their incomes.

Empowering the poor is incomplete without considering the special role of women in the development process (Nurfaisah, 2025). Women are often the backbones of families and communities, and empowering them can have far-reaching positive impacts (Kurniawan & Hidayat, 2020). Support for skill training, access to capital, and mentoring in business management can enhance the economic role of women in society. Economically independent women also tend to be more active in supporting their families' education and welfare. Infrastructure development is an important factor in empowering the poor, especially those living in remote areas (Sohag, 2025). Good infrastructure, such as transportation networks and electricity access, can open doors for trade and local economic growth (Simorangkir, 2022). Increased regional connectivity can also open opportunities for the poor to engage in wider markets.

Actors also need to be present to be able to help poor people who are used to getting free social assistance, in order for them to understand community empowerment. In this case, the village government can be an important actor to help change the mindset of poor people in interpreting community empowerment (Oktavia and Wihastuti, 2020). Empowering the poor towards economic independence is not only the responsibility of the government, but also a shared task for entire communities. By creating an ecosystem that supports education, skill training, access to capital, and business development, it is possible to change their social and economic realities. Empowering the poor is not only an investment in themselves, but also an investment in the development of a more just and sustainable society.



Figure 6: Comparison of Capital Assistance or Credit Received by RTG Households or Businesses in 2016-2020 and Impact of the 2020 Economic Shocks

Source: Syamsulhakim and Khadijah, 2021

ty (Kao et al., 2016).

3. Adaptability

Adaptive social policies are key to addressing the ever-changing social dynamics in society. In an era of change, uncertainty, and global challenges, adaptive policies are a vital instrument for ensuring societal well-being (Nikitina & Pozhilova, 2023). What follows is the discussion regarding the importance of adaptive social policies and the way they help to achieve the goal of shared well-being. One important aspect of social dynamics is demographic change. Adaptive social policies must be able to accommodate changes in the structure and composition of the population. For example, with the increasing number of elderly people in the population, health and social service policies must be adjusted to meet their welfare needs (Andari, 2019). Thus, adaptive social policies will help to maintain sustainability and relevance in the face of ongoing demographic changes. In the context of social dynamics, economic challenges are often the main trigger of change. Adaptive social policies must be able to provide a quick and effective response to economic uncertainty. This can include the provision of a strong social safety net to protect people from the negative impacts of economic crises, as well as training and reintegration programs to help those who lose their jobs (Tobing, 2023).

Adaptability in social policy also calculates the risks of social assistance that are still being and has been given to aid recipients, one way of which is through community empowerment programs (Aisyah & Rangkuti, 2023). Policies that can adapt to societal diversity can create a stronger foundation for welfare. Community empowerment through education programs, skill training, and better access to resources will

increase the competitiveness and contribution of all people in society (Herwina & Mustakim, 2019). However, for the case of PKH in 2016-2020, some graduate households still had not received the empowerment program, which was expected to prevent the risk of them falling back into poverty.

Adapting social policies to global challenges is also important to discuss. Global health crises, such as the one the world faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlight the need for adaptive social policies. Rapid responses to health emergencies, including providing better access to health services and financial support for affected communities, are integral to adaptive social policies. In the face of global health threats, these policies must also be able to provide protection and support to the most vulnerable sectors (Bhatt & Bathija, 2018).

Education plays a key role in bridging gaps and providing opportunities for social and economic progress. Adaptive social policies should include educational strategies that prepare communities for change (Hubel et al., 2023). This can involve integrating technology into the education system, providing programs of skill training that are relevant to the needs of the labor market, and making efforts to increase access to education for all levels of society (Safa & Lubis, 2024). Adaptive social policies should also include environmental and sustainability dimensions. In the face of climate change and other environmental challenges, these policies should be able to provide incentives and support for initiatives that favor sustainable development. Resource protection and policies that reduce environmental impacts should also be an integral part of adaptive social policies (Qutbi & Sarjan, 2024).

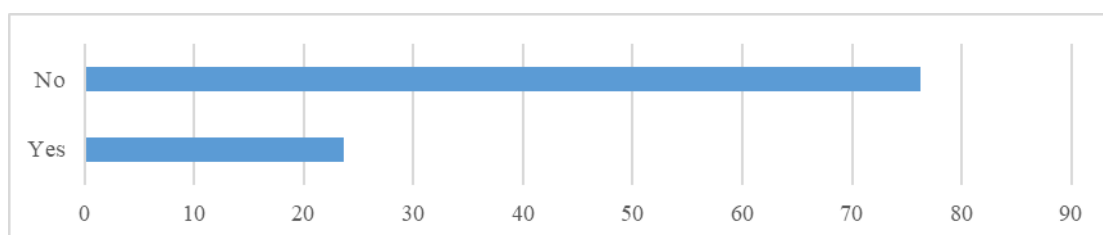


Figure 7: Proportion of RTGs Given Information on Other Empowerment Programs (%)

Source: Syamsulhakim and Khadijah, 2021

The importance of adaptive social policies is not only about addressing current changes and challenges, but also about creating a solid foundation for shared prosperity for the future. By incorporating flexibility, societal adaptability, and participation, social policy can be an effective instrument to respond to ever-evolving social dynamics. Challenges and changes are a natural part of the process in society, and adaptive social policies are key to responding and achieving sustainable and shared prosperity (Prihantika et al., 2024).

4. Rationality

Social policy is the backbone of achieving the goal of public welfare. However, the success of a policy does not only lie in good intentions, but also in the extent to which the policy produces rational outputs and impacts (Alexandri, 2020). What follows is the discussion of how important rational outputs and outcomes are present in social policy and how this can shape a more just and sustainable society.

Rational outputs and outcomes in the context of social policy refer to the efficiency and effectiveness of a policy. Rational outputs mean that the resources used to implement the policy are used optimally without waste (Hughes & Ekins, 2018). Meanwhile, rational outcomes indicate that the initial objectives of the policy are achieved with significant positive impacts on society. In the face of limited resources, rational social policies must be able to increase the efficiency of the use of available resources. This involves careful evaluation of the allocation of funds, time, and labor to achieve maximum results. For example, the use of information technology in the administration of social policies can reduce administrative costs and speed up the process of serving communities (Hilhorst et al., 2022).

For social policy to be rational and measurable, it must be responsive to the real needs of society. In-depth analysis of social, economic, and cultural dynamics is needed in order that policies can be adjusted to evolving needs. Feedback mechanisms from society must also be integrated into the policy planning and implementation process to ensure that the policy remains relevant and effective over time (Moynihan & Soss, 2014). The importance of rational outcomes in social policy is closely related to efforts to address social inequality

and disparities. Well-designed policies should be able to reduce income disparities, provide equal access to health and education services, and create equal opportunities for all society levels. Rational results in this context will be reflected in the form of increased welfare and decreased poverty rates (Kusuma, 2024).

Policies that support sustainable resource use, environmental protection, and social inclusion can create lasting positive impacts for future generations. Therefore, sustainability should be a focus in the formulation and implementation of social policies. The importance of rational outcomes and output also refers to community involvement in policy planning (Rijal, 2023). Active involvement of communities in the policy formulation process can provide a better understanding of their needs and expectations. Transparency and accountability are key to creating rational outputs and outcomes (Parindingan et al., 2024). The public has the right to know about the implementation of social policies and the extent of their impact (Sirajuddin, 2009). Therefore, the government and policy-implementing institutions must present information transparently and be ready to be responsible for every decision taken. This not only builds public trust but also creates a strong foundation for future policy improvement and enhancement (Mappisabbi, 2024).

Systematic and ongoing evaluation can provide in-depth insights into the effectiveness of a policy (Kakembo, 2024). The results of this evaluation can be used to improve existing policies, identify weaknesses, and adjust strategies to achieve better results. Therefore, a well-planned evaluation cycle should be an integral part of the implementation of any social policy. As such, social impact is the true measure of the success of a social policy (Jones & Valero-Silva, 2021). The importance of measuring real and positive impacts on society cannot be overstated. In the context of health policy, for example, it is not only the amount of provided health services that must be measured, but also changes in the health of the community. Involving communities in the impact measurement process can provide valuable perspectives and ensure that policies truly meet their needs (Hamdillah, 2023).

It is important to understand that rational outcomes and outputs in social policy are not

the end goal, but a means to achieve a more just and sustainable society. The success of a policy is not only measured by how well the policy is presented in documents, but also by the extent to which the policy is able to create positive changes in people's lives. By focusing on rational outcomes and outputs, social policy can be a force that drives positive change towards a better future for all. By adopting these principles, the GEAR model can help optimize the implementation of the Promising Families Program (PKH) holistically in ways that are more efficient, responsive to change, and sustainable. The success of the program can be measured through inclusive economic growth, community empowerment, adaptability to change, and rational program management.

CONCLUSION

Although social assistance, as with the Promising Families Program (PKH) and Direct Cash Assistance (BLT), has provided short-term benefits to the poor, their effectiveness in overcoming long-term poverty is questionable. The community's dependence on social assistance shows weaknesses in policies that only focus on instant solutions, without touching on the roots of structural problems such as education, economic inequality, and lack of access to employment. In addition, data have shown that the increased allocation of social assistance is not in line with a significant decrease in poverty.

The use of social assistance is often politicized by elite actors, especially in the run-up to elections, to strengthen their political support. The distribution of social assistance is centered on regions that are electorally strategic and show the existence of a strong patron-client relationship in its implementation. This strengthens the position of the political elite while weakening the potential of communities to be independent. On the other hand, the limitations of accountability and transparency mechanisms in the distribution of social assistance add to the complexity of the problem. Therefore, policy reform is considered urgent.

As a solution, this article offers an approach based on the GEAR (Growth, Empowerment, Adaptability, and Rationality) social policy model. This model emphasizes the importance of inclusive economic growth, com-

munity empowerment, policy adaptation to social change, and rationality in resource allocation. Usage of digital technology to increase transparency, execution of institutional reform, and strengthening of community participation are key elements in this effort. With a more strategic and sustainable approach, social policy in Indonesia is expected to transform from the distribution of social assistance to community empowerment that focuses on economic independence.

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