

The Impacts of Village Fund Direct Cash Assistance Distribution Implementation during the COVID-19

Rizky Mita utami¹, Dwiyanto Indiahono^{2*}, dan Sendy Noviko³

Public Administration Department Social and Political Sciences Faculty

Universitas Jenderal Soedirman

*Corresponding author: dwiyanto.indiahono@unsoed.ac.id

ABSTRACT Direct cash assistance has often been criticized for its limited impact in the long-term community empowerment. However during the Covid-19 pandemic this method of assistance was deemed necessary to help the poor survive. This article discusses the implementation of the Village Fund Direct Cash Assistance (*Bantuan Langsung Tunai-Dana Desa/BLT-DD*) policy during COVID-19 pandemic in Sokawera Village, Banyumas Regency. The study aimed to determine the impacts of implementation of the BLT-DD policy in Sokawera Village. A descriptive qualitative method was selected for the study, and the research was conducted in Sokawera Village, Cilongok District, Banyumas Regency, Central Java. Study data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. The results showed that target groups felt appropriate benefits of the BLT-DD and are satisfied bottom-up decision making approach of the program. Based on the discussions attended by program implementers, namely village officials, village council (BPD), community unit heads (*Ketua RW*), neighborhood unit heads (*Ketua RT*) and community leaders, human resource capacity was deemed adequate to implement the policy and there was no influence of power or interests among implementers that affect policy implementation. The strategy adopted in implementing the policy is to conduct an awareness campaign and establish cooperation between the stakeholders. The study discovered several obstacles, namely the misuse of BLT-DD benefits, distribution delays, limited budget resulting in limited distribution, non-compliance of certain implementers, and the emergence of social envy among residents. The implication of this study is that the government can develop an application system that can help identify the target group correctly. In addition, the government must also ensure the availability of a budget for the poor, so that assistance can cover poor families as the overall target group.

KEYWORDS COVID-19; Direct Cash Assistance; Policies; Implementation; Village Fund.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all sectors of life, including the persistent health threats, the weakening of the economy, and the decline in people's purchasing power marked by increasing unemployment and poverty. As a result, the unemployment rate is estimated to increase by 4 to 5.5 million people (Gusman, 2020), while the number of people living in poverty is predicted to increase from 24.79 million to 28.7 million people (Fauzia, 2020). The Indonesian government attempted

to overcome the challenges by expanding the social safety net (*Jaring Pengaman Sosial/ JPS*) program and refocusing the use of village fund. Village fund is sourced from the state budget (*APBN/ Anggaran Pendapatan dan Belanja Negara*) allocated for villages to finance village administration, village development, community development, and community empowerment.

Regulation of the Minister of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration Number 6 of 2020 concerning changes in priorities in the use of village

funds stipulates that 2020 village funds are prioritized for the prevention and handling of COVID-19 pandemic, Village Cash Intensive Work and Village Fund Direct Cash Assistance (Bantuan Langsung Tunai-Dana Desa/BLT-DD). BLT-DD is a cash assistance program for the poor derived from village funds and the amount is determined at 25-35% of the total village funds received by each village.

The BLT-DD policy has elicited mixed responses. One opinion argued that the policy has shifted from catering to general interests of the public, such as the construction of roads, bridges and other infrastructure constructions. BLT-DD only caters to a certain group of people and this is considered unfair. However, another opinion argued that the policy is the most suitable action in an emergency situation due to the COVID-19 pandemic (J. Ali & Khan, 2022; Kurniawan, 2020). BLT-DD is also extremely beneficial in saving people's lives and economy during the pandemic (Pramanik, 2020; Sukmana et al., 2021), and in strengthening household food security (Amrullah et al., 2020). BLT is also deemed significant in maintaining people's purchasing power, ensuring business continuity and minimizing the impact of layoffs (Engka et al., 2021; Iping, 2020).

The BLT-DD policy is the only social assistance policy whose overall management is executed with the village government. This is deemed acceptable when compared to the distribution of other aids, which generally experienced various types of misuse prior to reaching the targeted recipients. Therefore, the BLT-DD policy potentially eliminates misuse since the funds are channeled directly to the village. On the other hand, this presents a considerable challenge for the village government in that the capacity of the

village government is tested in managing the program in compliance with regulations and in accordance with the objectives. Good human resource management is able to ensure that the behavior of implementers is in accordance with the organization's implementation strategy (Nicolás-Agustín et al., 2022).

The common challenge experienced by village governments in implementing the direct cash assistance is that the available budget is not sufficient to be distributed to all eligible recipients, resulting in many eligible residents not receiving the benefits of BLT-DD. This problem happened during the BLT-DD implementation in Sokawera Village. Sokawera Village is located in Cilongok District, Banyumas Regency, Central Java. The village received the highest amount of BLT-DD distributed in 2020, as indicated in Table 1.

Tabel 1.
BLT-DD Distribution in Cilongok District
in 2020

No.	Village	BLT-DD Amount (Rupiah)
1	Panusupan	746,100,000
2	Jatisaba	590,400,000
3	Kasegeran	640,800,000
4	Pejogol	630,900,000
5	Langgongsari	480,600,000
6	Pageraji	727,200,000
7	Sudimara	555,300,000
8	Batuanten	527,700,000
9	Cipete	569,700,000
10	Cilongok	604,800,000
11	Pernasidi	584,100,000
12	Cikidang	411,300,000
13	Karanglo	390,600,000
14	Kalisari	375,300,000
15	Karang Tengah	843,300,000
16	Panembangan	464,400,000
17	Rancamaya	527,400,000
18	Sambirata	759,600,000
19	Gununglurah	839,700,000
20	Sokawera	895,800,000

Source: (Community and Village Empowerment Social Service Banyumas, 2020)

Table 1 indicates that the amount of BLT-DD distributed to Sokawera Village is Rp895,800,000, the largest compared to other villages in Cilongok District. The data collection for BLT-DD's Beneficiary Families (BF) started with the process of collecting data

on prospective recipients by the neighborhood unit heads (*Ketua RT*). Subsequently, the collected data were discussed at the village level during the special village deliberation forum (*Musdessus*) to determine the eventual recipients of the BLT-DD.

Tabel 2.
Beneficiary Families and BLT-DD Allocation in Sokawera Village in 2020

No.	Month	Number of BF (families)	BLT-DD Allocation per Family (Rupiah)	Total BLT-DD per Month (Rupiah)
1.	April	377	600,000	226,200,000
2.	May	377	600,000	226,200,000
3.	June	374	600,000	224,400,000
4.	July	210	300,000	63,000,000
5.	August	227	300,000	68,100,000
6.	September	227	300,000	68,100,000
7.	October	22	300,000	6,600,000
8.	November	22	300,000	6,600,000
9.	December	22	300,000	6,600,000
			Total Amount	895,800,000

Source: (Sokawera, 2020)

Table 2 indicates that 377 families received BLT-DD allocation in April 2020 and May 2020, however only 374 families received the funds in June 2020. This happened since three families received other social assistance in the form of supplementary Non-Cash Food Assistance (BPNT), hence they were excluded from the BLT-DD recipients. Subsequently, there were 210 recipients in July 2020, and the recipient number increased by 17 families in August 2020 and September 2020 due to the availability of budget that could be channeled to families that met the BLT-DD recipient criteria but had not received the allocation in the previous distribution. During the last distribution stage, from October 2020 to December 2020, the number of recipients increased by 22 families. In this case, the village government needed to repeatedly verify the recipient data to ensure

that the data did not overlap with other social assistance programs.

This study aimed to examine the implementation of BLT-DD policy in Sokawera Village by focusing on two main research aspects, namely the policy content and the implementation environment. In policy content, the study examined the interests of the target group, benefit types, decision making locations, program implementers, and resources involved. In implementation environment, it investigated the power, interests and strategies of policy actors, as well as the aspect of compliance and responsiveness. This research is essential in analyzing the dynamics of implementing poverty alleviation policies during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic provided extremely valuable lessons for policy makers and policy implementers,

who were demanded to quickly design and implement poverty alleviation programs in a rapidly changing crisis environment (M. J. Ali et al., 2022; Nishan & Mohamed, 2021; Sahu, 2021) with policies designed to encourage communication and coordination to realize fair and just policies (Tran-Nam et al., 2021).

This research was conducted in Sokawera Village, Cilongok District, Banyumas Regency and was intended to examine the implementation of BLT-DD in Sokawera Village. This study utilized descriptive qualitative research methods, while data collection was carried out through interviews, observations, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted by interviewing village officials, members of the village council (BPD), neighborhood unit heads (RT heads), community unit heads (RW heads), and residents who received BLT-DD allocation. Interviews were conducted using semi-structured interview guidelines which were then developed according to conditions in the research field. Observations have been made by observing the distribution of BLT-DD to the target group. The documents needed in compiling the research report include various reports on the implementation of BLT-DD, village profiles, and data relevant to BLT-DD. The informants met by the researchers are believed to know in detail about the dynamics of BLT-DD implementation in Sokawera Village, Banyumas Regency. The study informants were selected using purposive sampling and snowball sampling technique, and included village officials, members of the village council (BPD), neighborhood unit heads (*Ketua RT*), community unit heads (*Ketua RW*), and residents who received BLT-DD allocation. To achieve a high level of

confidence, data triangulation approach was carried out and data verification had been carried out (Tracy, 2013). The validity test of the research data was conducted using data source triangulation techniques by comparing data sourced from interviews, observations, and documentation. An interactive data analysis model was utilized as data analysis technique in this study (Miles et al., 2014).

DISCUSSION

Target Group'Interests

The target group's interest aspect refers to the extent to which the interests of the target group are contained in the content of the policy and the extent to which these interests have an influence on policy implementation. This aspect argues that a policy implementation must cater to various interests. The BLT-DD policy is one of the policies issued by Indonesian government to minimize the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially on the village economy. The target group for the BLT-DD policy is the poor families in villages affected by the pandemic. The BLT-DD policy has been implemented since 2020 after the issuance of the Regulation of the Minister of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions and Transmigration Number 6 of 2020 concerning Priorities for the Use of Village Funds in 2020.

The BLT-DD policy was warmly welcomed by BLT-DD recipients in Sokawera Village, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, although the impact was relatively small due to the limited amount of BLT-DD allocation and its temporary nature. The BLT-DD allocation was stipulated at Rp600,000 in the first phase in 2020, and Rp300,000 in the

second phase of 2020. In 2021, this provision was regulated in the Minister of Finance Regulation Number 40 of 2020 concerning Village Fund Management.

The interests of the target group, which include meeting the needs of daily life in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, have been included in the BLT-DD policy. Thus, this is in line with the argument of Grindle, who stated that a policy implementation can be considered successful if the content of the policy covers the interests of the group that is the target of the policy (Grindle, 1980). BLT-DD is a form of direct subsidy from the central government to residents affected by COVID-19, and the interests of citizens are in accordance with the values in the policy, increasing the carrying capacity of citizens to implement the policies. It is this target group's support that provides the policy an opportunity to succeed. Research in parts of Sumatra, Java, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Bali, Nusa Tenggara, Maluku, and Papua shows the effective implementation of BLT-DD from the regulation aspect, function and task aspect, as well as plan and result aspect (Sofi, 2021). Being sensitive to the interests and needs of the community is the key to the development of sustainable development programs (Groulx et al., 2021). BLT-type of assistance has also been shown to significantly reduce poverty rates by four and six percentage points in Zambia (Paul et al., 2021).

Benefit Types

The benefit types aspect indicates that, in a policy, there must be several types of benefits that are contained and produce a positive impact after the policy is implemented (Grindle, 1980). Policies issued

by the government must be able to provide useful results or have a positive impact and encourage change for the better. The BLT-DD policy is one of the government policies included in the social safety net (JPS) during the COVID-19 pandemic. The policy aims to help poor families meet their basic needs, prevent a decline in their welfare due to economic difficulties, and increase shared social responsibility.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all sectors of life, especially the economic sector. The BLT-DD policy presented a considerable hope for people affected by COVID-19 who had not received any social assistance and were experiencing economic difficulties due to the pandemic. Most BLT-DD recipients in Sokawera Village used the BLT-DD distribution to meet their basic daily needs. However, in certain community groups, it was found that the BLT-DD was used for other non-basic needs. Several reports stated that this was influenced by differences in the provisions in determining BLT-DD recipients in 2020 and 2021. Misuse of benefits was more common in 2020, during which beneficiaries were not correctly targeted since the determination of BLT-DD recipients was based on equity for people who had not received other types of social assistance.

From the preceding explanations, it can be concluded that the types of benefits received by the target group are intended to meet basic daily needs in accordance with the objectives of the BLT-DD policy. Meanwhile, the benefit misuse highlights the lack of accuracy in targeting BLT-DD recipients and the discrepancy between the objectives and the benefits in the field. This inaccuracy in targeting recipients is frequently discovered

during the implementation of similar policies, such as in Mojoruntut Village, Krembung District, Sidoarjo Regency (Arumdani et al., 2021), Carawali Village, Sidrap Regency (Yunita & Agustang, 2022), Lansot Village, Kema District, North Minahasa Regency (Masambe et al., 2021), Haruman Village, Leles District, Garut Regency (Suparman et al., 2021), Medan Marelan District, Medan City (Febriaty, 2021), and Sumedang Regency (Herdiana et al., 2021).

Decision Making Locations

The decision making locations aspect is related to where the decision making of a policy will be implemented and whether the location of the decision making is correct (Grindle, 1980). Decision making in a policy plays an important role since incorrect location of decision making potentially causes problems in the policy implementation. The implementation of the BLT-DD policy is a coordination process between various sectors and levels of government from the central government to the village government. The implementation of the policy in Sokawera Village had been carried out in 2020 and 2021.

Based on the results of the study, the BLT-DD policy in Sokawera Village is a collective decision by the village government through a meeting to determine the prospective recipients of BLT-DD attended by village institutions such as village council (BPD), community unit heads (*Ketua RW*), neighborhood unit heads (*Ketua RT*) and community leaders. In addition, BLT-DD decision making in Sokawera Village was carried out using the bottom-up approach, in which the decision-making process started from the

process of collecting data of prospective BLT-DD recipients in the lowest administrative level, namely neighborhood units (RT). The location of the decision-making by the Sokawera Village government is considered correct and in accordance with the provisions stipulated in the Guidelines for Data Collection of BLT-DD Recipients issued by the Ministry of Finance. Bottom-up implementation is needed to realize policies related to sensitive public (environmental) matters (Arvizu-Piña et al., 2019), the social component of higher education (Marushkevych et al., 2021), the sustainability of higher education funding (Mazon et al., 2020), and regional policy innovation (Bours et al., 2021).

Program Implementers

The program implementer is the implementing organization, namely the bureaucratic organizations with the responsibility to implement the policy. A policy will not run without a policy implementer (Grindle, 1980), and policy implementers are strongly influenced by the environment and policy organization (Marani et al., 2022). The implementer of a policy must be stated in detail in the policy documents.

The Regulation of the Ministry of Village, Development of Disadvantaged Regions and Transmigration Number 6 of 2020 states that the highest authority in the implementation of BLT-DD is the village government. However, in its implementation, village heads can be assisted by village officials and other village institutions. The results of previous studies show that the implementer of the BLT-DD program in Sokawera Village is the village government, led by the village head. In addition to the Sokawera Village government,

other village institutions such as the village council (BPD), neighborhood unit heads (*Ketua RT*), community unit heads (*Ketua RW*), and community leaders were also involved. Implementers' compliance and competence are unique constructs that can be reliably measured for monitoring and evaluation (Cross & West, 2011). Implementers of policy occasionally have a more critical perception of the change process (Drummond et al., 2017).

In practice, the BLT-DD policy in Sokawera Village had been implemented in 3 (three) stages, including 9 (nine) distributions in 2020, and 4 (four) distributions in 2021. The implementation of BLT-DD distribution in Sokawera Village has been satisfactory, indicated by an increase in the quality of BLT-DD recipient targeting in 2021 compared to 2020. However, a delay in distribution occurred in 2021. The allocation, which should have been distributed monthly, was

distributed in April 2021 due to fund transfer delays from the central government.

Resources

The resources aspect suggests that the implementation of a policy must be supported by adequate resources to ensure successful implementation of the policy. These resources are divided into two categories, namely material resources (financial) and human resources (non-material). Financial resources refer the adequacy of investment capital for a certain program or policy (Edward III, 1984; Indiahono, 2017). The financial resource of the BLT-DD policy is the village fund. The village fund is an on-budget allocation that can be used directly to support efforts to reduce the impact of COVID-19 at the household and village levels. As a result of the issuance of the BLT-DD policy, villages must reallocate village funds to finance BLT-DD.

Tabel 3.
Budget and Beneficiary Families of BLT-DD in Sokawera Village in 2020 and 2021

No	Year	Month	Beneficiary Families (families)	BLT-DD Allocation per Family (Rupiah)	Total BLT-DD Allocation (Rupiah)
1.	2020	April - May	377	600,000	452,400,000
		June	374	600,000	224,400,000
		July	210	300,000	63,000,000
		August - September	227	300,000	136,200,000
		October - December	22	300,000	19,800,000
TOTAL					895,800,000
2.	2021	January - May	151	300,000	226,500,000
		June - October	151	300,000	226,500,000
		November - December	151	300,000	90,600,000
TOTAL					543,600,000

Source: (Sokawera, 2020, 2021)

Table 3 shows that the total BLT-DD allocation in 2020 is Rp895.8 million. This amount decreased in 2021, with total budget

allocation of Rp543.6 million. The allocation amount has to be adjusted to the needs of the community who needs to receive BLT-

DD. Due to the limitation, there are residents who did not receive the BLT-DD allocation.

Human resources refer the adequacy of both quality and quantity of implementers that can cover the entire target group (Edward III, 1984). A policy implementation is successfully achieved if the available human resources have the quality and ability to carry out their duties properly to accomplish the objectives. Based on the results of the study, the policy actors involved in the implementation of BLT-DD policy in Sokawera Village indicate adequate human resource capacity to implement the BLT-DD program in Sokawera Village.

In addition to human resources, resources that can be applied so that the implementation of BLT-DD can run optimally is by utilizing technology. This is as done by Pagar Jati Lubuk Pakam Village. The assessment of BLT recipients based on various criteria in accordance with the provisions of the law is carried out using PhpMyadmin. The use of this web-based information system shows the adaptive attitude of the village government to changes in the service environment and its public policies. The information system developed will facilitate decision making, and make information more perfect regarding the names of BLT priority recipient villages (Sinaga et al., 2021).

Policy Actors' Power, Interests and Strategies

A policy needs to consider the power, interests and strategies used by the actors involved to facilitate the policy implementation process (Grindle, 1980). Power is the authority obtained by a person or a group to exercise the privileges afforded by the authority in accordance

with the authority provision. Based on the results of the study, the highest authority in implementing the BLT-DD policy lies with village heads, who are assisted by village officials and other institutions in the village. Sokawera Village was able to successfully carry out data collection and distribution of BLT-DD allocation. It can be concluded, therefore, that Sokawera Village is able to distribute the BLT-DD allocation for the target group. Implementation actors must not only understand strategies when formulating plans, but must also have an implementation strategy (Tawse et al., 2019).

Implementation actors must be able to use information for implementation in a policy environment, which is useful to achieve efficiency, adequacy, and consistency (Gunarathne & Lee, 2021). On the interests of the policy actors, the implementation of the BLT-DD policy in Sokawera Village was carried out in a professional manner and was evidently based on the results of meetings attended by various stakeholders of the policy implementation. During the process, there were no personal interests of the actors or the interests of other parties that influenced or were involved in the implementation of the BLT-DD policy in Sokawera Village.

Concerning policy actors' strategies, the strategy carried out by the Sokawera Village government in implementing the BLT-DD policy is to establish good communication with the residents by conducting an awareness campaign, through deliberation forums at the respective neighborhood units (RT) and at the village level. The subsequent strategy is cooperation between relevant stakeholders in the implementation of BLT-DD distribution, which was intended to

ensure that all stakeholders shared only one mission and that the implementation of BLT-DD could run smoothly and achieve the desired objectives.

Compliance and Responsiveness

The compliance and responsiveness aspects argue that it is necessary to pay attention to the extent of compliance and response from implementers in responding to a certain policy. Compliance implies the extent to which implementers' actions are in accordance with what is stated in the policy document (laws, government regulations, or policy programs) (Purwanto & Sulistyastuti, 2015). The success of a policy implementation is largely determined by the issue of handling administrative and management affairs and is measured by the accuracy or ability to follow various regulations that have been stipulated.

Based on the results of the study, the Sokawera Village government has followed the Instructions of the Minister of Home Affairs Number 3 of 2020 concerning the Prevention of Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Villages through Village Funds (APBDes) and the Regulation of the Minister of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions and Transmigration Number 6 of 2020 concerning Priority Use of Funds Villages in 2020. In its implementation, there were 14 criteria that had to be applied in determining BLT-DD recipients, however, in Sokawera Village, only three criteria were applicable. Therefore, it can be said that implementation compliance has not yet been achieved. The constantly changing criteria present problems in the implementation of BLT-DD policy (Aseh et al., 2021).

Responsiveness in public policy refers to the response of the public target to the implementation of a policy (Wibawani et al., 2021). The study results showed that the BLT-DD policy in Sokawera Village had caused a certain community turmoil in the form of community conflicts due to social envy between residents since the BLT-DD allocation was only distributed to certain groups of residents.

CONCLUSION

The study shows that the implementation of the BLT-DD policy in Sokawera Village has fulfilled the interests of the target group, especially to meet daily basic needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, several beneficiary groups used the BLT-DD allocation to fulfill non-basic needs, hence further monitoring is required by the implementation actors. The implementers of the BLT-DD policy establish cooperation between policy actors from the village government, neighborhood unit heads (*Ketua RT*), community unit heads (*Ketua RW*), village council (BPD), and community leaders who have fulfilled their capacity in implementing the BLT-DD distribution policies. In the future, village governments are encouraged to take advantage of the advanced information technology to facilitate prioritization of BLT-DD recipients.

The implementation of BLT-DD policy in Sokawera Village has been carried out in a transparent and professional manner, characterized by the absence of power or interests that influence policy implementation. However, the implementation of the policy encounters several obstacles, including limited budget,

which creates conflicts between residents in the form of social envy from residents who did not receive the assistance. The policy implementers have since attempted to address the issue by conducting outreach to the community to minimize and eliminate conflicts.

The implication of this study is that the government can develop an application system that can help identify the target group correctly. In addition, the government must also ensure the availability of a budget for the poor, so that assistance can cover poor families as the overall target group.

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