

Does Community Cohesion Present Challenges for Social Protection Programs? Case of the Program of Subsidized Rice for the Poor in Purbalingga District

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the potential linkage of cohesiveness with the problems of distribution inaccuracy of social protection programs in Indonesia. It will focus on the program of subsidized rice for the poor, with a case study in Purbalingga district. Through qualitative and descriptive statistic methods, this study presents the existence of conceptual and empirical linkage of cohesiveness with distribution inaccuracy. Community cohesiveness present challenges for the top-down nature of program design and implementation. Preserving cohesiveness has been the main justification of almost all actors in doing equal distribution of the program. Solution for this problem will depend on government willingness to initiate community based targeting system, involving community and local leaders in enlistment and distribution of the program.

Keywords

community cohesion; Javanese society; social protection program

INTRODUCTION

The problem of poverty in Indonesia lies not only at the headcount, but also at vulnerability. In 2017, while the poverty rate was about 10.2% of population, another 30% was very prone to fall into poverty (BPS, 2018). Various social protection programs has since 2000s been implemented to transfer cash, free services and subsidized rice. The target was about 15.5 million households officially listed as the poor and the vulnerable. The programs include the Program of Subsidized Rice for the Poor (*Raskin*), the Program of Scholarship for the Poor Student (*Bea-*

siswa Siswa Tidak Mampu), the Program of Health Insurance for the Poor (*Jamkesmas*), the Program of Conditional Cash Transfer (*Program Keluarga Harapan*), and the Program of Unconditional Cash Transfer (*Bantuan Langsung Tunai*).

Various studies find inaccuracies in program's distribution. Cash and kinds were transferred not only to the eligible but also the other member of community (Arif, Syu-

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kri, Holmes, & Febriany, 2010; Sumarto & Widyanti, 2008; Sutiyo & Maharjan, 2011, 2013). Several studies already identify the causes, among others are inappropriateness of indicators to select beneficiaries (Alatas, Banerjee, Hanna, Olken, & Tobias, 2010) and low government capacity to manage the programs (Arif et al., 2010; Sumarto & Widyanti, 2008; Sutiyo & Maharjan, 2011). Focusing mainly to the program content, the studies recommend the government to improve the enumeration and to strengthen monitoring. The government incrementally made several improvements, but the distribution inaccuracies remain existed.

An important issue less discussed in literatures is the context of implementation. Theoretically, implementation of any programs does not only depend on its content, but also on the contextual factors. The context may include various institutions, norms and rules, which provide either support or resistance. Initial findings present that equal distribution was initiated by village officers perceiving it was the best way to maintain harmony and prevent jealousy within community (Alatas et al., 2010; Sutiyo & Maharjan, 2013). These findings indicate that community cohesion may become a cultural context framing the program implementation. A deeper understanding about the contextual factors of program implementation will be useful for concept development and policy improvement. This study aims to explore the linkage between community cohesion and distribution of social protection program, through a case of the program of Subsidized Rice for the Poor in a selected district of Javanese society. The program is selected because it is the largest social protection program in Indonesia (Sutiyo & Maharjan, 2011).

Community Cohesion in Javanese Society

The concept of community cohesion is rather abstract. It refers to strong cooperation and solidarity among various individuals within a group. Babajanian (2012) elaborates that the concept emphasizes on two inter-related dimensions: equity of distribution

of resources and opportunities; close interaction within community members. Bruhn (2014) finds that definitions of cohesiveness have evolved over time, and so instruments applied to measure. He argues that social network analysis is quite useful to understand the patterns of social ties and network connections, which are conducive to different degrees of cohesiveness.

In culture of Javanese society, moral guidance in social interaction includes harmonious integration, avoidance of open conflict, understanding of others and empathy (Geertz, 1961). Community interest is supposed to set above the individual (Alexander & Alexander, 1982; Kawamura, 2011). Alexander and Alexander (1982) find that the roots of these principles came from the nature of traditional agricultural community. In the absence of advanced technology, households rely on cooperation to prepare cropland, harvest rice and other tasks. Tradition of work sharing creates close interdependence between neighbors. This encourages cooperation and togetherness in good or difficult condition.

Several studies present the existing of those above-mentioned traditions. Beard (2007) describes that to build and maintain infrastructures, community relied on reciprocal system where households contribute resources in order to receive benefits. System of mutual-assistances help households to get loan from neighbors (Geertz, 1992; Okten & Osili, 2004), to expand business (Karmilah, Nuryanti, Soewarno, & Setiawan, 2014), and to cope with various difficulties like job scarcity (Alexander & Alexander, 1982), sick and death (Ravallion & Dearden, 1988), and monetary crisis (Breman, 2001). The important factor to sustain the traditions is social punishment given to the free riders and violators (Kawamura, 2011), which includes being gossiped and regarded as stubborn. People avoid these sanctions by perform good manner and help the neighbors. Kawamura (2011) finds some kind of social investment within the traditions. People help the other in order to invest good will, and expect to similar treatment when they are in difficulties.

Community leaders morally have responsibility to maintain cohesiveness. Sutiyo and Maharjan (2014) find that one way to maintain cohesiveness is by giving fair treatment, and listening complaints from all groups. Public decision is made in deliberation (musyawarah) to achieve consensus (mufakat) and to make sure that everybody got some benefits.

The Program of Subsidized Rice for the Poor

The Program of Subsidized Rice for the Poor distributes 15 kg of rice with the cost at IDR 1,500 per kg, every month per household. It has subsidized 85% of the normal price. The program was started in 1999, and was managed together by the central and local government. The Central Statistical Agency (BPS) enumerates the eligible households. The State Logistical Agency (*Bulog*) procures and sends the rice to village offices every month. The village officers distribute it to the beneficiaries, and collect the payment. The district officers monitor the implementation to ensure that the rice is distributed as accordingly (Sutiyo & Maharjan, 2011).

Among various social protection measures in Indonesia, the program suffers foremost from distribution inaccuracy (Sumarto & Widyanti, 2008; Sutiyo & Maharjan, 2013). There are two types of inaccuracy,

which were leakage and under-coverage. Leakage means the ineligible became recipients, while under-coverage means the program could not cover all poor people. It is reported that in some study sites, 63% of ineligible receive some of the rice (Banerjee, Hanna, Kyle, Olken, & Sumarto, 2015), and that the eligible only get half of the promised amount, averagely (Sutiyo & Maharjan, 2013).

METHODS

This is a case study in Purbalingga district, which is one of the poorest districts in Central Java province. Javanese ethnic mainly occupies the district. Administratively, it is divided into 18 sub-districts and 256 villages. One village in each district is selected, totally making 18 study villages (Fig. 1)

There were about 240,000 households in the district, and 100,281 households out of them were officially listed as beneficiaries of social protection programs (BPS Purbalingga, 2015). Their names and some main demographic data are available in the Unified Database of Social Protection Programs (*Basis Data Terpadu*) in Local Planning Agency. From the database, 36 households are randomly selected from each study village, totally making 648 respondents in the district.

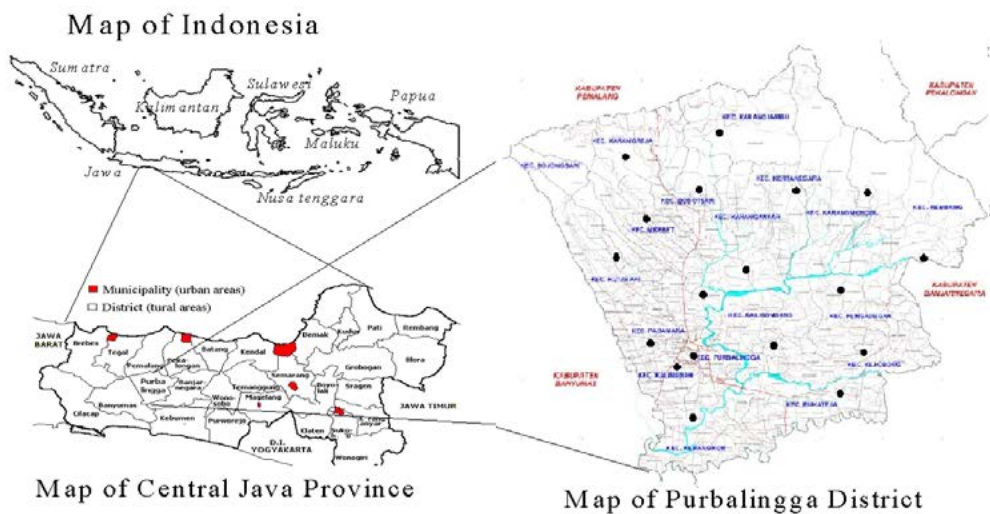


Figure 1. Map of Purbalingga District Presenting Study Villages (Without Scale)

Data were collected through two rounds of fieldworks. Firstly, eighteen trained enumerators were employed to distribute questionnaires in July to August 2015. Secondly, the author conducted in-depth interviews, focused group discussions and observations thereafter. Interviews were performed to villagers, village officers, district officers and some prominent community members. This study employs qualitative techniques of data analysis with some descriptive statistics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Economic Condition of Study sites

The district is mostly hilly areas located in the foot of Slamet Mountain. It is predominantly agricultural areas where farmers planted rice, corn and cassava. In plain view, there were no substantial differences between the poor and most population. For illustration, most households had semi permanent housing built from brick and wood. Electricity was available, with only 3% of households having no access. Clean water was usually provided from private wall. Motor cycle had been a common vehicle, and most households already had it. With these common features, the poor and vulnerable could not be easily identified within the community. It was then understandable that many residents said that there were no "rich" or "poor" households, rather than "just enough" and "not-quite enough" ones.

Most respondents were headed by male (89%) with elementary level of education (52%), and working in agriculture (30%). The average member was four people per household. Five percent of them had members with physical defect, and 16% had members suffering from chronic illness. With lack of healthcare and insurance system, this figure indicates that they might need help from neighbors when getting sick (Table 1).

Table 1. Socio-Economic Condition of the Respondents

Socio Economic Condition	Num-ber	Per-centage
Gender of HH Heads		
Male	577	89%
Female	71	11%
Education of HH Heads		
Having no formal education	274	42%
Elementary School	335	52%
Junior High School	35	5%
Senior High School	4	1%
Occupation of HH Heads		
Agriculture	250	39%
Labour	203	31%
Business	52	8%
Service	24	4%
Other	95	15%
HHs with chronic illnesses	102	16%
HHs with pregnant members	18	3%
HHs with child under five	164	25%
HHs with physical disabilities	31	5%

HH: Household

Source: Field Survey, 2015

Community Cohesiveness in the Study Sites

Settlement in the study sites was grouped into hamlets (*dusun*) agglomerated in flat lands separated by river, field, hill, forest and natural boundaries. Hamlet is a sub unit of village government. Social and economic interactions were primarily concentrated within it. Residents had face-to-face interaction, knew each other, and spent a long time of interaction in this relatively isolated area. As a small but isolated group, the geographic character of hamlet promotes cohesiveness. Various gatherings were available through Friday praying, monthly *arisan*, and so on. Most respondents perceived that the tradition to help each other was high (59%), level of trust was medium (55%), and conflict between them was low (60%) (Fig. 2).

Several traditions presented cohesiveness. If one villager was sick, had accident, or passed away, then neighbors visited and donated cash to relieve the pain. In moments of celebration like the birth of baby,

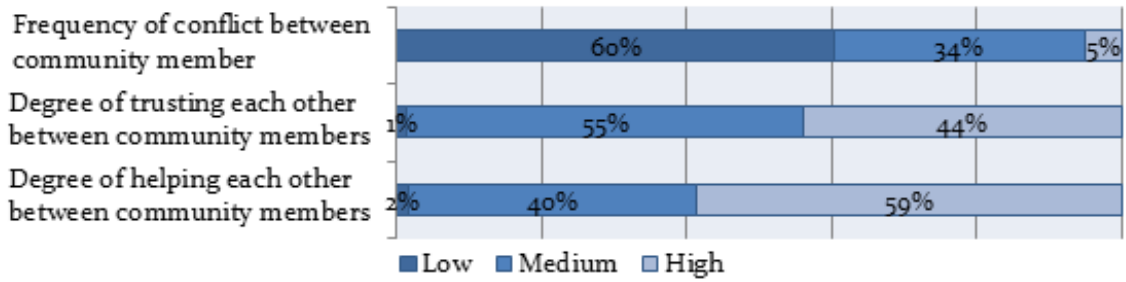


Figure 2. Level of Community Cohesion in the Study Sites
Source: Field survey, 2015

circumcision and marriage, neighbors came to involve in party and presented gift. In broader scope, village officers mobilized contribution to build road, irrigation canal, and mosque. To repair the poor houses, the government had a program to allocate IDR 10 Million to stimulate community contribution. Every year, the program repaired one house in each village.

Tradition of helping each other, especially during shocks, played role as informal social protection. Care and support are given to the sufferers. Neighbor's help was often more reliable than government programs. For example, when a house was damaged due to typhoon, it was the neighbors, not the government agency, that helped to repair. When an accident happened, neighbors helped to transport to the hospitals, and not the ambulance coming to the victims. Generally, community gave priority to the least poor, female households, widow and those regarded being cooperative.

Distribution Inaccuracies in the Program

The central government based on enumeration of the statistical agency issued the list of beneficiaries. Beneficiaries were selected based on indicators of housing and assets. In the view of villagers and local officers, the list was invalid and did not reflect the real economic status. Many households locally perceived poor were not listed, while some non-poor were listed. Lack of revision increased public refusal toward the list.

Village officers then took unilateral decision to distribute the rice for the non-listed households. In some cases, it was con-

sulted and agreed by village councils. Equal distribution was practiced for many years, and could not be changed so far. Portion of distribution inaccuracy was substantial. Only 10% respondents accurately received 15 kg of rice. Most of the respondents received only 7 kg (Fig. 3)

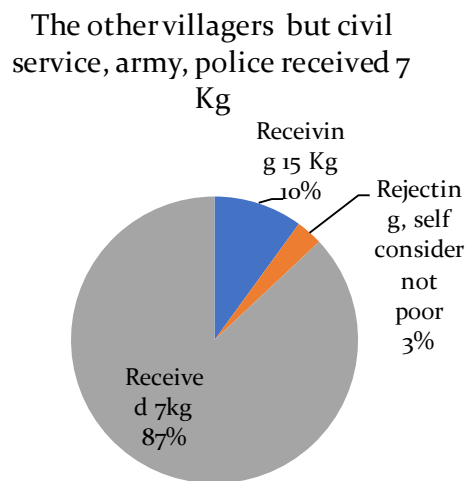


Figure 3. Portion of Distribution Inaccuracy
Source: Field survey, 2015

Village head perceived that the moral responsibility of a leader was to treat villagers fairly. To distribute the rice equally was perceived not wrong, but the best way to make the program socially acceptable. The other motivation was to prevent jealousy. Many village heads were worried that it created reluctance of community to contribute in infrastructure development. Several village heads tried to minimize inaccuracy, yet no one was fully successful. Many believed that the program was not suitable to local

culture. One headman said:

“The program cannot be implemented as according to the rules. There are many poor people excluded in the list. If I distribute only to the listed households, it means that I have closed my eyes and have no wisdom to my people. The village council, neighborhood heads and many villagers agree with my decision. It created no problem, even make the program acceptable.” [Mr. N, Karanggedang officer, 12 August 2015 at the village office].

The listed beneficiaries were those suffering from economic loss because of decrease in the amount of distributed rice. Most of them were aware that they had rights, and that to distribute less than 15 kg was a mistake. Many respondents simply accepted inaccuracy for the sake of solidarity, minimizing dislike and sustaining cohesiveness. They also expected social benefits, and that the economic loss was compensated by harmonious relationship, neighbor willingness to help him during difficulties, and the expectation to be a solid community when coping other forms of economic risks. Even, some of the listed beneficiaries rejected to receive the rice because they felt not poor. Yet, some poorest households really needed full allotment, but they were not brave enough to complain. One informant said as follows:

“Here, I may be the poorest ones. To have sufficient food every day is difficult for me. To be honest, I need that 15 kg, but I receive 8 Kg. The neighborhood head told me that I have to share the allotment with the other villagers. I am not dare to protest them... I am not dare to report to police. It makes me having many enemies, and makes me in more difficult situation.” [Mr. R, Farmer, Kedungmenjangan villagers, 20 August 2015, at the house]

The non-listed people blamed the enumeration process, and that the government did not understand the real condition of villagers. They urged equal treatment because having similar livelihood difficulties with the listed people. One informant said:

“In village, there is no rich man, but “just

enough” people. Today I have money, but next week may not. Except those having salary like teacher. These are fact. I also have the same rights for the program. We face the same risk, because similarly, we are only famer.” [Mr. K, Farmer, Meri village, 10 July 2015 at the house]

Law forbade giving the program to non-listed people forbidden practice. Yet, none of village officers were given punishment, reported to the police and got punishment. Even, there was a common understanding that the practice was permitted in shake of social stability. Persuasive efforts by district officers were implemented but creating only minimum result. The district officers, as told by one informant publicly knew equal distribution:

“Equal distribution of the program has been practiced so long. Almost no village in the district is able to distribute based on the list. It is formally not right, but I have to understand the reality. I can just persuasively approach the village head and tell that the rice is the rights of the listed beneficiaries... Reporting to the police is not a good idea, but making everything worse.” [Mr. T.P.R, 40 years old, civil servant, 19 August 2015, at the office]

Implication of Distribution Inaccuracy

Decreased allotment created economic lost of the program benefits. Averagely, it is found that rice consumption was 8.73 kg per person per month, or about 29.08 kg per household. If the program was accurately distributed, it provided 52% of the consumption. Due to leakage, the beneficiaries received only 24% of the needs. As implication, there was a tendency that those receiving decreased allotment experienced some kind of food insecurity. It was found that 3% respondents ever consumed improper food because not able to obtain rice. Although statistically there was no significant association between allotment and food insecurity, the more a respondent receiving allotment, the less they consumed improper food (Table 2).

Table 2. Association between Rice Allotment and Food Insecurity

Rice Allotment	Consumption of Improper Food in the Last Three Month		P Value
	Never	Ever	
15 kg	65 (100%)	0	0.113
Less than 15kg	566 (97%)	17 (3%)	

Source: Field Survey, 2015

Note: Chi Square is applied

It was not clear whether the poor received some social benefits as compensation of decreased allotment. They felt to be treated by other as usual, and community still preserved high degree of solidarity. Those receiving full allotment never being rejected or prosecuted publicly. The more identifiable implication is found in governmental affairs. Village officers identified a decrease in public protests after the rice was equally distributed. It also made them easier to mobilize villagers in public works.

DISCUSSION

Geographical characters of settlement, household socio-economic condition, and cultural values of Javanese society preserve high degree of cohesiveness in the study sites. Close interaction, low conflict, strong cooperation, high trusty as well as solidarity among the residents present the cohesiveness. The existing cohesiveness creates a kind of informal social protection like neighbor's helps and cares, which in many cases are more reliable than the government programs.

Community, as a whole, keeps cohesiveness and is afraid that it will be damaged by the troubles of enumeration of assistance programs. From the qualitative explanation as well as personal insights of village officers and community members, it is found that maintaining cohesiveness and social harmony has been the main justification to distribute the program equally. It is also the main motivation of the poor to accept decreased amount of allotment, together with expectation not to lose helps and ca-

res from neighbors. Some economic lost of the program is compensated by decreasing protest to community leader and stability in governmental affairs.

All of these findings present that there are both conceptual and empirical linkage between community cohesion and distribution inaccuracy of social protection programs. In the other word, community cohesion presents a challenge for implementation of the program. It does not mean that the program cannot be implemented at all. It can be successfully distributed only if the enumeration process as well s indicators of poverty are improved, together with publicly involving community and village officers in the enlistment. Culturally, community preserves a local wisdom to solve any problems. In the context of Javanese society, it was a system of deliberation (*musyawarah*) to achieve consensus (*mufakat*) that will help mitigate the problem. The deliberation will open a public discourse, dialogue, and understanding about the local realities, thus a better way to improve targeting and minimizing inaccuracy will be identified.

CONCLUSION

Community cohesion has become a cultural context framing the implementation of social protection program, as presented by the case of the Program of Subsidized Rice for the Poor in Purbalingga district. Cohesiveness creates a kind of informal social protection through neighbor's helps and cares. It presents challenges during program implementation, as becoming the justification and motivation of various village actors to do equal distribution. Unless the government pays serious attention to this contextual factor, the program will always faces implementation gaps. The government is recommended to involve community and village leaders in beneficiary enlistment, and developing a system of community based targeting in social protection program, so that there will be no trade-off between informal and formal social protections within the community.

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