

Original Article

The Implementation of Poverty Alleviation Policy during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Case Study of Pekalongan Regency, Indonesia

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic has altered the perception of poverty, necessitating rapid and urgent implementation of an affirmative policy. COVID-19 has significantly affected the economy, health, children's education, and employment rates. The Central Bureau of Statistics reported that the number of low-income families in Indonesia's urban and rural areas in 2020 was 26.42 million. This figure increased by 5.09 percent compared with 2019, which was 25.14 million. This issue is challenging to address because of budgetary constraints. Numerous policies have been implemented to mitigate poverty during the COVID-19 pandemic, but these efforts have not yielded significant results. This study aims to analyze the implementation of poverty alleviation policies during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Pekalongan Regency, Indonesia. This mixed-methodology study collected data through surveys with 150 respondents and in-depth interviews with ten low-income families, community leaders, and local government actors. These results indicate that poverty alleviation policies during the COVID-19 pandemic have not been fully implemented. Inhibiting factors include the accessibility of poverty programs and activities, the high number of impoverished individuals affected by COVID-19, and the diversion of local government funds to address COVID-19.

Keywords: Poverty; Policy implementation; Poor families; COVID-19 Pandemic



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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the view of poverty. COVID-19 is the cause of very fast poverty and urgently requires affirmative policies. Indonesia's COVID-19 data, as of January 31, 2021, reached 1,078,314 cases. The number of recovered patients increased by 873,221, and those who died increased by 29,998. The condition of Central Java, which includes the province with the largest number of cases, confirmed 168,152 cases, suspected 3,544 cases, 5,790 were treated, 151,796 were declared cured, and 10,566 people died (<https://corona.jatengprov.go.id/data>). The high number of cases has an impact as well. Badan Pusat Statistik of Indonesia report noted that the number of poor in urban and rural Indonesia in 2020 was 26.42 million. This figure increased by 5.09% compared to the previous year, 25.14 million (Akbar & Purnaweni, 2021). The same condition

occurred in Central Java, which increased by 11.41 percent or 301,500 people in 2020 (3.99 million people) compared to the poor population in September 2019, which amounted to 3.68 million people or 10.58 percent. Conditions that also occur in urban districts in Central Java. One of them is the Pekalongan Regency. In October 2020, Pekalongan Regency was included in the red zone. In 2021, there were 2420 cases, with 69 people being treated, 2070 were declared cured, 155 were self-isolating, and 126 people died (<https://corona.pekalongankab.go.id/>). Pekalongan Regency also experienced a change in terms of poverty. In 2019, the poor population in Pekalongan Regency decreased compared to 2018. In 2019, it was 9.71 percent, while in 2018, it was 10.06%. The pandemic conditions that hit the country increased the number of poor people to 10.19 percent higher than in 2018.

The poverty line of Pekalongan Regency over the last five years has continued to rise yearly. The condition of the Pekalongan Regency poverty line in 2020 increased to IDR 403,662-/capita/month compared to 2019, which was IDR 382,832-/capita/month. The poverty line of the Pekalongan Regency in 2020 is above the Central Java Province average of IDR 395,407-/capita/month and the National IDR 454,652-/capita/month. It ranks highest compared to the surrounding districts, such as Pemalang, Purbalingga, Banjarnegara and Batang. The relative position of the poverty line in Pekalongan Regency shows that the expenditure of people experiencing poverty in Pekalongan Regency is higher than that of other regencies around it. The problems that arise are whether implementing poverty reduction policies during the COVID-19 pandemic has not established rules or the level of vulnerability, whose scope is increasingly widespread. This study will explore the factors that influenced poverty during the COVID-19 pandemic in Pekalongan Regency and the role of the social security program in alleviating poverty during the pandemic. The research will be conducted in the Pekalongan Regency to analyze the factors that influence the increase in poverty.

2. Literature Review

Poverty is a problem that shackles most developing countries. This phenomenon becomes interesting because the longer poverty becomes an icon of the state in the welfare of its people. Poverty is no longer just a lack of clothing, food, and shelter but has spread in various dimensions such as dependence, marginalization, gender inequality, vulnerability and even powerlessness. Poverty also shackles those who interpret poverty itself. For example, the World Bank, UNDP, ADB, the Ministry of Social Affairs, TNP2K, and local governments are trying to translate poverty into how programs are formulated. Kaja & Werker (2010) define poverty as pronounced deprivation in well-being and comprises many dimensions. It includes low income and the inability to acquire the basic goods and services necessary for survival with dignity. Poverty also encompasses a low level of health and education, poor access to clean water and sanitation, inadequate physical security, lack of voice, and insufficient capacity and opportunity to better one's life (Haughton & Khandker, 2009). (Shaffer, 2008) revealed the development of thinking and attention to aspects of poverty shows a fundamental change where the concept of poverty is getting wider (not only physiological deprivations, but to include social deprivations), the causes of poverty are broadening (including social, political, cultural, violence and natural resources), and the focus of poverty is deepening (covering to social protection, mitigation and risk reduction strategies).

The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed greatly to poverty. The Central Statistics Agency noted that Indonesia's number of poor people was 27.55 million, or equivalent to 10.19 percent in September 2020. The head of BPS, Suhariyanto, described the factors influencing the poverty rate from March 2020 to September 2020. The ongoing COVID-19 impacts changes in behavior and economic activity of the population to encourage an increase in the poverty rate. Indonesian economy in the third quarter of 2020, compared to the third quarter of 2019, experienced a growth contraction of 3.49 percent. This figure is much lower than the achievement in the third quarter of 2019 which grew by 5.02 percent. The growth in household consumption expenditure in the third quarter of 2020 Gross Domestic Product (GDP) slowed down. Household consumption expenditure contracted by 4.04 percent; a decrease compared to the same period in 2019, which grew by 5.01 percent. From March 2020 to September 2020, the general inflation rate was recorded at 0.12 percent. Meanwhile, the core inflation rate for the same period was recorded at 0.84 percent. For March 2020 to September 2020 period, nationally, the retail prices of several basic commodities rose, including beef 1.51 percent, sweetened at 1.07 percent, cooking oil at 2.67 percent, wheat flour at 2.76 percent, and mackerel at 1.07 percent, although some commodities that experienced a decline in prices such as rice fell at 0.49 percent, chicken meat at 3.52 percent, sugar at 6.54 percent, cayenne pepper at 32.37 percent, chicken eggs at 6.12 percent.

In August 2020, the open unemployment rate (TPT) was 7.07 percent, an increase of 1.84 percentage points compared to August 2019, which was 5.23 percent; A total of 29.12 million people of working age or 14.28 percent were affected by COVID-19 in August 2020, with details of 2.56 million people being unemployed, 760 thousand people being out of the labor force, 1.77 million people temporarily not working, and 24 .03 million people work with reduced working hours. Also, in August 2020, the percentage of underemployed workers was 10.19 percent, an increase of 3.77 percentage points compared to August 2019, which was 6.42 percent. As COVID-19 was widespread, social security became one of the main instruments of government policy. The government's central and regional social assistance is very helpful for the population, especially the lower-class population. However, it is recognized that not all those affected have been able to take advantage of the assistance (Damayanti, 2021). Social distancing and general lockdowns are

part of everyday life in many countries, and they have enormous social and economic consequences, including in Indonesia. At this time, the government is starting to put plans to stabilize the economy and support people's livelihoods. The government of Indonesia has implemented several poverty reduction policies through economic stimulus and compensation programs to cope with the unprecedented impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a total budget of IDR 563 trillion (USD35.9B).

The Social Safety Net (JPS) during the COVID-19 pandemic in Pekalongan Regency was allocated through state funding, the Central Java and Pekalongan budgets, village funds, and pre-employment cards. More specifically, state funding is allocated for the Family Hope Program (PKH) to as many as 33,781 families, BPNT/Sembako is allocated to 55,508 families, Ministry of Social Affairs' cash transfers are allocated to 32,460 families. Central Java Province budget funding was allocated for as many as 8,846 families, Pekalongan regional budget for social assistance to as many as 75,034 families, and village funds allocated for cash transfers. Based on the results of the BPS demographic survey followed by 87,379 respondents, the large-scale social restrictions (PSBB) due to the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in changes in behavior, economic activity, and income from all walks of life declined (Indonesia Statistic, 2020). Interventions for poverty reduction programs/projects are clear, but the reality of poverty as measured by indicators of the number of poor and near-poor people is still relatively high. Various programs have been implemented in both sectoral programs. The program aims to increase the dignity of many people's lives, as well as specific programs with the themes of community empowerment, urban/rural poverty alleviation, coastal community economic development, savings and loan village economics, and so on. However, the welfare of society is far from expectations.

3. Materials and Methods

The study used a qualitative descriptive method. Qualitative descriptive design formats have many similarities with quantitative descriptive designs. Therefore, qualitative descriptive designs can also be called quasi-qualitative or quasi-qualitative designs. The qualitative descriptive format analyzes more on the surface of the data. It only pays attention to the processes of occurrence of a phenomenon, not the meaning of the data or depth. The informants of this research are the implementers of poverty alleviation in the Pekalongan Regency. It consists of Regional Apparatus Organizations that handle poverty alleviation programs, namely Bappeda, Social Service, Community Empowerment Service, and agencies, members of the regional poverty reduction team, and community leaders in the District, District, and Village. This research will also touch on the affected communities using the questionnaire as a data collection tool. It is estimated that there are approximately 150-200 respondents. Data collection techniques used are in-depth interviews, questionnaires, observation and documentation. Data processing explains how the procedures for processing and analyzing data. Suyanto & Sutinah (2013) said that data processing in qualitative research is done by classifying or categorizing data based on several themes according to the research focus. Data processing in this study consists of data reduction, data presentation (data display) and conclusion.

4. Results

The number of poor people in Pekalongan Regency in 2020 amounted to 91.90 thousand people (10.19 percent), an increase of 4.9 thousand people compared to people experiencing poverty in 2019, which amounted to 87 thousand people (9.71 percent). The increase in the number and percentage of poor people in 2020 also occurred at the National and Central Java provincial levels. It can be seen in Figure 1.

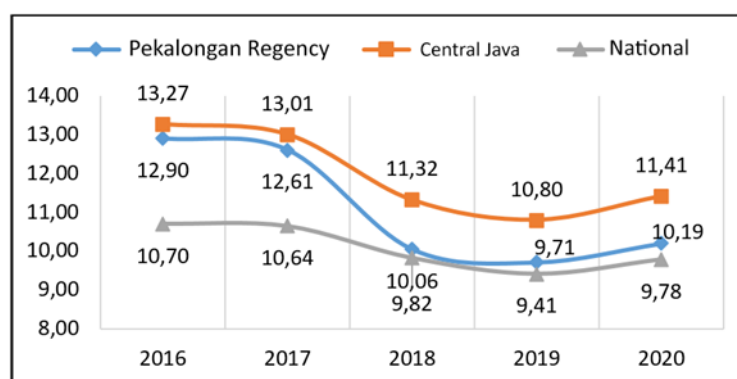


Figure 1. Percentage of Poor Population in Pekalongan Regency in 2016-2020 (%)

Source: Badan Pusat Statistik, Central Java (2021)

Figure 1 shows the relative position of the percentage and number of poor people in Pekalongan Regency in 2020 compared to the surrounding districts is the second lowest after Batang Regency, and the percentage of poor people in

Pekalongan Regency in 2020 is below the Central Java Province average of 11.41% and above the average National 9.78%.

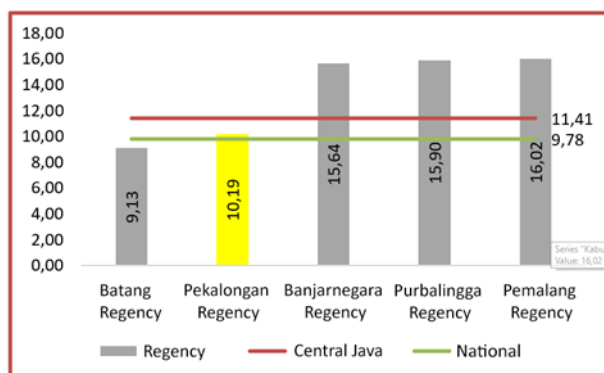


Figure 2. The Relative Position of the Percentage of Poor People in Pekalongan Regency in 2020
Source: Badan Pusat Statistik, Central Java (2021)

Figure 2 indicates the Poverty Depth Index (P1), while the description of the distribution/inequality of expenditure among people is indicated by the Poverty Severity Index (P2). P1 and P2 of Pekalongan Regency in 2020 experienced an increase compared to the development of P1 and P2 of Pekalongan Regency in previous years, which continued to experience a decline. In 2020, Pekalongan Regency P1 increased to 1.42, and P2 increased to 0.29. In relative position, the Poverty Depth Index (P1) and Poverty Severity Index (P2) Pekalongan Regency in 2020 are below the average of Central Java and National Provinces and, compared to the surrounding regencies, the lowest position. This condition indicates that the expenditure gap between people and the poverty line and the expenditure disparity among people in the Pekalongan Regency is lower than in other regencies in Central Java.

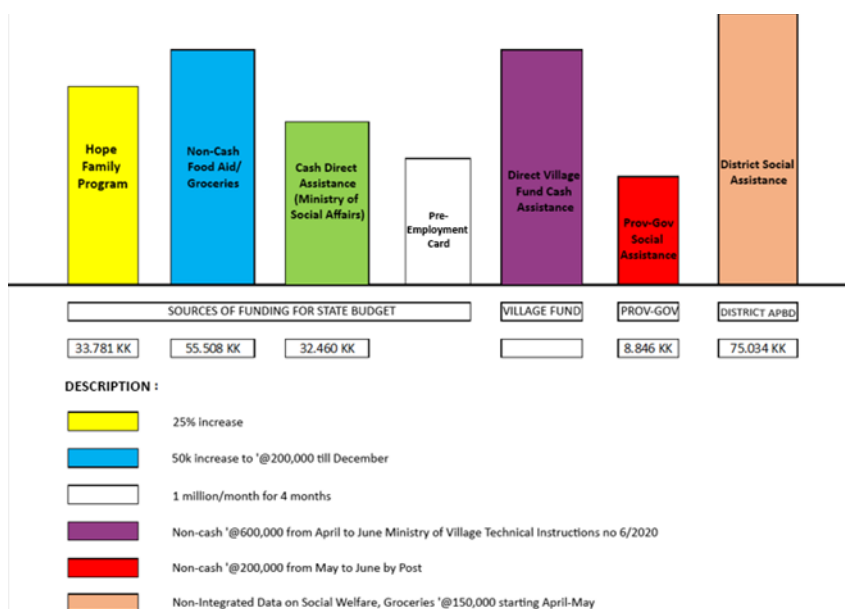


Figure 3. Overview of the Social Safety Net (JPS) of Pekalongan Regency during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The increasing number of poor people has prompted the government to make public policy affirmations, namely the issuance of various regulations to prevent the spread of the poor population and to overcome this COVID-19 pandemic. Before COVID-19 hit, the government implemented a four-track strategy: pro-growth, pro-job, pro-poor, and pro-environment. This 4-track strategy promotes equitable economic growth (growth with equity) through expanding employment opportunities, reducing poverty levels, maintaining sustainable growth, and emphasizing environmental sustainability (see Figure 3). Through this strategy, it is hoped that the problem of inequality can also be further reduced. The big national development agenda has been in the Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) from 2004-2009 to 2020-2024 RPJMN (<http://www.setneg.go.id>).

In the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) 2020-2024, the government has determined that the poverty rate will decrease from 7% to 6.5% by 2024. It is targeted to reach the number of poor people at the end of 2024, which ranges from 18.34 million to 19.75 million. There must be a decrease in the number of poor people between 5.04 and 6.45 million from 2020 to 2024. The increase also influenced the soaring poverty rate in retail prices of basic commodities, such as rice, broiler meat, cooking oil, broiler eggs, and sugar. From September 2019 to March 2020, the retail prices of several basic commodities increased. Rice prices rose 1.78 percent, chicken meat 5.53 percent, cooking oil 7.06 percent, chicken eggs 11.10 percent, and sugar 13.35 percent. In addition to the issue of rising food prices and making a major contribution to the national poverty profile, the tourism sector also contributed to Indonesia's poverty rate as of March 2020. Although the government officially announced the COVID-19 case in March, the tourism sector and its supporters have been affected since February, and tourist visits to Foreigners to Indonesia in March 2020 fell 64.11 percent compared to March 2019 (Nasution & Sutapa, 2020).

Although COVID-19 is predicted to cause an economic crisis, the current government is relatively more prepared because it has social assistance and protection programs that can be used as anchors to reduce the burden of socio-economic problems. The government's policy to provide stimulus to anticipate the COVID-19 pandemic by increasing and expanding social safety nets is considered appropriate. Social assistance and protection programs that serve as anchors can serve as initial instruments in increasing program benefits, with the government expanding the coverage of beneficiaries in parallel. The following is a table of changes to the Social Assistance Program, and Non-Contribution Scheme for residents affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic. The issuance of Perppu No. 1/2020 (currently has been stipulated as Law Number 2 of 2020 concerning Stipulation of Government Regulation instead of Law Number 1 of 2020 concerning State Financial Policy and Financial System Stability for Handling the COVID-19 Pandemic and/or in Facing the Threats Endangering the National Economy and/or Financial System Stability Becomes Law) and Presidential Decree no. 54/2020 provides a w instrument to minimize the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on social and economic conditions. The government's efforts in poverty alleviation have inspired local governments to develop similar policies. The Governor of Central Java issues the Decree of the Governor of Central Java as Chair of the Task Force for the Acceleration of Handling Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) in Central Java Province Number 440.1/108 of 2020 concerning Standard Operating and Law Enforcement Procedures for Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) Health Protocols in Central Java Province. Previously, the Governor of Central Java had issued Central Java Governor Regulation Number 60 of 2019 concerning the Regional Poverty Reduction Strategy of Central Java Province for 2019-2023. Although it does not specifically regulate poverty during the COVID-19 pandemic, this policy is still maintained to overcome the spike in poverty.

The same condition occurs in the Pekalongan Regency. The Regulation of the Regent of Pekalongan Number 33 of 2020 concerning Guidelines for the Implementation of Adaptation of New Habits Towards a Healthy and Productive Society During the 2019 Corona Virus Disease Pandemic in Pekalongan Regency is the basis for the formulation of programs and activities of regional officials. Previously, the Pekalongan Regency Government had Pekalongan Regent Regulation Number 39 of 2019 concerning Poverty Reduction. Article 15 states that the strategy for accelerating poverty alleviation is carried out by reducing the burden of spending on the poor in the regions, increasing the capacity and income of the poor in the regions, developing and ensuring the sustainability of micro and small businesses and synergizing poverty reduction policies and programs in the regions with the provincial and central governments. Furthermore, Article 17 of this Regent's Regulation formulates that the Poverty Reduction Program is grouped into 4 programs consisting of programs. Firstly, family-based integrated social assistance programs aim to fulfil basic rights, reduce the burden of life, and improve the quality of life for people experiencing poverty. Secondly, community empowerment-based poverty reduction program groups aim to develop the potential and strengthen the capacity of poor community groups to be involved in development based on the principles of community empowerment. Thirdly, poverty alleviation programs are based on the empowerment of micro and small economic enterprises to provide access and strengthen the economy for micro and small-scale business actors. Lastly, other programs can directly or indirectly improve economic activities and the welfare of low-income people.

4. Discussion

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government, through the Pekalongan Regent Regulation Number 36 of 2020 concerning Changes in the 2020 Pekalongan Regency Government Work Plan, which formulated poverty reduction policies was carried out with two approaches, namely the fulfillment of basic life access to reduce the burden of expenditure, and sustainable livelihoods to increase community income. The target of this policy is primarily for the poor and vulnerable, people experiencing poverty, and people affected by COVID-19 socially and economically. Meanwhile, the policy to reduce unemployment is directed at expanding employment opportunities, improving the quality and productivity of the workforce, as well as protecting workers and job seekers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, the poverty alleviation policies are as follows. The first is social protection guarantees, especially for heads of non-productive poor households. The second is improving protection, rehabilitation, provision of guarantees and empowerment of socially vulnerable groups (PMKS). The third is developing a productive economic business based on

local potential, empowerment of SMEs, capital for joint ventures, training and work skills in various job training centers, empowerment, training and provision of capital for vulnerable socio-economic families and women. The fourth is youth entrepreneurship development, which improves skills and fosters youth entrepreneurial spirit and new SME-based entrepreneurs. The fifth is the expansion and development of employment opportunities, improvement of the quality and competence of the workforce, competitive working conditions, improvement of the climate and strengthening of industrial labor relations, and improvement of labor welfare.

What has been done by the government indicates that public policies in poverty alleviation have been implemented but have not been optimal (Gibson & Olivia, 2020; Han et al., 2020; Olivia et al., 2020; Sparrow et al., 2020; Suryahadi et al., 2020). As quoted by Sapru (2004), Easton defines public policy as the authoritative allocation of values for the whole society or as the coercive allocation of values to all members of society. Laswell and Kaplan also define public policy as a projected program of goals, values, and practices or a program of achieving goals, values in directed practices. Pressman & Wildavsky (1984) define public policy as a hypothesis containing initial conditions and predictable consequences (Nasirin & Lionardo, 2021; Taufiqurakhman, 2014; Winarno, 2002).

Howlett (2009) explained that policy is an effort to influence the system to achieve the desired goals. These efforts and actions are strategic, namely long-term and comprehensive. Meanwhile, Sururi (2016) explained in more detail that public policy is a product that can fight for the people's interests and always involves the people who are also the target group. The policy is directed at people's interests and falls into the hands of the government in the decision-making process. The government has the right to determine whether or not the policy needs to be implemented. According to him, as stated by Nugroho (2018), whatever governments choose to do or not do is what Governments do, why they do it, and what difference it makes. Public policy is an effort to understand and interpret what the government does or does not do in response to existing problems, as well as what causes or influences it and what effects and impacts will occur from the public policy (Birkland, 2015; Dye, 2013; Gerston, 2014).

Some of the factors found in this study relate to two things: internal and external factors of society. The internal factor of the poor group in very poor condition, apart from losing their jobs, is the narrowing of business opportunities. PPKM is considered to hinder the efforts of people experiencing poverty. Limited conditions, low accessibility to aid, and declining purchasing power impact deeper vulnerability. The formulated policies will only be dreams and good plans stored neatly in the archives if not implemented (Wahab, 1997). External factors refer to the government's role in implementing policies. Grindle (1980) states that implementation is a general process of administrative action that can be investigated at the level of a particular program. According to Grindle (2017), the success of implementation is influenced by two major variables, namely, the content of the policy and the implementation environment (context of implementation). The implementation process will only start when the goals and objectives have been set, the activity program has been structured, and the funds are ready and distributed to achieve the targets. In line with Van Meter & Van Horn (1975) study, policy implementation is an action taken by government and private organizations individually and in groups to achieve goals (Parsons, 1995; Wibawa, 1994).

The Pekalongan government has made many efforts, but the limited regional financial condition and limited transfer of funds impact the solving of the problem of poverty. Local government officials affected by COVID-19 are also an unavoidable factor. The policy's ability to systematize the implementation process includes clarity and consistency of goals, the accuracy of resource allocation, hierarchical integration within and between implementing agencies, clarity of decision rules from implementing agencies, conformity of the recruitment pattern for implementing officials and formal access from outsiders. The categories of factors outside the policy that affect the implementation process are shown through socio-economic and technological conditions, public support attitudes and resources of the group, support from officials or superiors, and commitment and leadership ability to implement officials (Keban, 2007). The policies implemented will be an important reference for implementing poverty reduction. The above variables will be applied to poverty reduction. The poverty approach is in line with the decentralization policy paradigm in handling social problems, including the problem of poverty. This approach recognizes the importance of community capacity to increase independence and internal strength through the ability to exercise internal control over material and non-material resources (Acosta & Nestore, 2020; Han et al., 2020).

5. Conclusion

The study results concluded that the COVID-19 pandemic affected the increase in the number of poor people. The COVID-19 pandemic that hit and contributed to increasing poverty became an inseparable follower variable. COVID-19 provides stress, especially particularistic policies whose implementation will differ from other programs. The policy will specifically pay attention to groups of the poor and those affected who become poor due to the pandemic. The factors that influence the increasing number of poor people found in this study are vulnerability, job loss, low accessibility in getting assistance and weak purchasing power. Meanwhile, factors from the government side were found, in addition to the limited coverage of funds for poverty alleviation and the implementation of special policies that were not optimal due to the large number of apparatuses affected by COVID-19.

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