

THE DILEMMA OF SOCIAL ASSISTANCE: IMPACT ON THE WELFARE OF THE SAMATURUE VILLAGE COMMUNITY, SINJAI REGENCY

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to analyze the positive and negative impacts of social assistance distribution on community welfare in Samaturue Village, Tellulimpoe Subdistrict, Sinjai Regency. The high poverty rate in this village, reaching approximately 61% of total household heads, has prompted the government to distribute various assistance programs, including the Family Hope Program (PKH), Non-Cash Food Assistance (BPNT), and Direct Cash Assistance (BLT). The study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive type. Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation involving village officials, social assistance facilitators, and assistance-recipient community members, then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The findings show that social assistance helps meet basic needs, eases household economic burdens, and strengthens social solidarity among residents. However, these positive impacts are temporary, as the assistance is mostly used for consumptive needs and has not yet driven significant economic change. The study also found negative impacts, including community dependency on assistance, declining work motivation, and social jealousy resulting from inaccurate targeting. Therefore, an integrated strategy is needed, encompassing strengthened economic empowerment, financial education, and improved data collection systems, so that social assistance can foster sustainable community self-reliance.



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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world after China, India, and the United States, with a projected population of 284.4 million in 2025 (BPS, 2024). While this demographic potential provides opportunities for economic growth, it also presents substantial challenges in achieving equitable social welfare across regions. Social welfare is not merely reflected in income levels but encompasses broader dimensions, including material well-being, social security, equal access to public services, and the fulfillment of fundamental human rights. According to (Collins et al., 2021), welfare should be understood as an individual's capability to live a life they value, supported by adequate access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and protection from social risks. Despite continuous economic development, poverty remains one of Indonesia's most persistent social challenges, particularly in rural communities where limited economic opportunities and unequal access to public services continue to constrain improvements in living standards.

Poverty remains closely associated with limited employment opportunities, low educational attainment, inadequate access to public services, and unequal distribution of development outcomes. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics of Sinjai Regency, the poverty rate in Sinjai Regency reached approximately 7.82% or around 1,940 people in 2024

(BPS Kabupaten Sinjai, 2024). However, the condition in Samaturue Village is considerably more severe. Data from the Integrated Social Welfare Database indicate that approximately 61% of households, equivalent to 102 families, are categorized as poor (Data Terpadu Kesejahteraan Sosial [DTKS], 2022). This substantial disparity illustrates that poverty is concentrated at the village level and highlights the need for targeted policy interventions. Consequently, Samaturue Village represents an important setting for examining how social protection policies influence community welfare within a rural context.

To address poverty and social vulnerability, the Indonesian government has implemented various social protection programs, among which social assistance constitutes one of the primary policy instruments. Social assistance refers to financial or in-kind support provided by the government to individuals, households, or communities experiencing social and economic vulnerability, with the objective of reducing social risks and improving welfare (Pertanian, 2025; BPS, 2025). In principle, social assistance is expected to strengthen household resilience, improve access to basic necessities, reduce vulnerability during economic shocks, and contribute to poverty alleviation. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these programs depends not only on the availability of government funding but also on the accuracy of beneficiary targeting, administrative capacity, transparency, and community participation throughout the implementation process.

In Samaturue Village, three major social assistance programs have been implemented to support low-income households. The first is Bantuan Pangan Non Tunai (BPNT), which provides food assistance through the basic food assistance scheme to households registered in the Integrated Social Welfare Database, benefiting 102 households. The second is the Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH), a conditional cash transfer program targeting poor households with elderly members, school-age children, persons with disabilities, or toddlers, covering 58 beneficiary households. The third is Bantuan Langsung Tunai (BLT) financed through the Village Fund, distributed to 28 households classified as extremely poor, widows, and individuals suffering from chronic illnesses. These programs collectively represent the government's commitment to reducing poverty and improving community welfare at the village level.

Although social assistance has become one of the government's principal poverty alleviation strategies, its implementation remains characterized by a fundamental dilemma. On the one hand, social assistance improves household consumption, increases food security, reduces financial vulnerability, and enables poor families to meet their basic needs. On the other hand, various studies have demonstrated that social assistance may unintentionally generate dependency, reduce work motivation, create social jealousy, and trigger conflicts regarding beneficiary eligibility when implementation is not supported by accurate data and transparent governance (Khoerunisa & Widiastuti, 2023; Purba, Maharani, Harahap, & Berlianti, 2024). Therefore, social assistance simultaneously represents an instrument for improving welfare and a potential source of new social challenges. Village governments consequently play a strategic role in ensuring that beneficiary selection, program implementation, and community participation are conducted fairly and transparently to maximize policy effectiveness (Rifka Alkhilyatul Ma'rifat, I Made Suraharta, 2024b).

Previous studies have produced mixed findings regarding the effectiveness of social assistance programs. (Annisa, 2024) reported that social assistance significantly improved the daily living conditions of poor households in Paninggilan Utara, Tangerang. Another study

by (Annisa, 2024) found that social assistance contributed positively to socio-economic welfare during the COVID-19 pandemic in Bandung City. Conversely, (Khoerunisa & Widiastuti, 2023) and (Ruslan, Usman, & Tahir, 2022) revealed a dual impact, whereby social assistance successfully reduced household economic burdens while simultaneously fostering dependency, passivity, and targeting inaccuracies. Similarly, (Rifka Alkhilyatul Ma'rifat, I Made Suraharta, 2024a) concluded that rice assistance programs were insufficient to reduce poverty sustainably because they merely fulfilled short-term consumption needs without improving long-term economic capacity. Furthermore, (Hakim et al., 2024) demonstrated that the effectiveness of social assistance differed considerably between urban and rural areas, indicating that local socioeconomic conditions substantially influence program outcomes.

Despite these valuable contributions, existing studies have largely focused on urban settings or the extraordinary circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. Comparatively limited attention has been given to rural communities where social assistance programs operate under different social, cultural, and economic conditions. Furthermore, previous research has generally emphasized either the economic benefits or implementation effectiveness of individual programs rather than comprehensively examining both the positive and negative consequences of multiple social assistance schemes within a single rural community. Consequently, there remains a research gap concerning how various forms of social assistance simultaneously influence economic welfare, social relationships, community participation, and beneficiary dependency in rural Indonesia.

Based on these considerations, this study investigates the impacts of social assistance on community welfare in Samaturue Village, Tellulimpoe District, Sinjai Regency. Specifically, the study seeks to analyze both the positive and negative consequences arising from the implementation of BPNT, PKH, and BLT programs within the local community. By examining social assistance from both economic and social perspectives, this research contributes to the literature on social welfare policy while providing empirical evidence from a rural setting that has received limited scholarly attention. The findings are expected to support policymakers and village governments in improving beneficiary targeting, strengthening program governance, enhancing community participation, and developing more sustainable social assistance policies that not only alleviate poverty but also promote long-term social welfare and community empowerment.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the positive and negative impacts of social assistance distribution on community welfare in Samaturue Village, Tellulimpoe Subdistrict, Sinjai Regency. A qualitative approach is appropriate for exploring social phenomena in their natural settings and for understanding participants' experiences, perceptions, and interactions through rich descriptive data, allowing researchers to capture meanings that cannot be adequately explained through quantitative methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The study was conducted in Samaturue Village, with informants selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in the implementation and receipt of social assistance programs. The participants included village government officials, social assistance facilitators, and beneficiaries of the Bantuan Pangan Non Tunai (BPNT), Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH), and Bantuan Langsung Tunai (BLT) programs. Data were collected through direct observation of the social assistance distribution process, semi-structured interviews to explore participants' experiences and perspectives, and

documentation comprising the Integrated Social Welfare Database (DTKS), official distribution reports, village administrative records, and field activity photographs. Employing multiple data collection techniques enabled the researchers to obtain comprehensive and contextual information while enhancing the completeness of the evidence collected (Yin, 2018).

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model developed by Miles et al. (2014), which consists of three interrelated stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction involved selecting, simplifying, and organizing information relevant to the research objectives, whereas data display presented the findings systematically to facilitate interpretation. The final stage involved drawing conclusions and continuously verifying emerging findings to ensure consistency throughout the analytical process (Miles et al., 2014). To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, source triangulation was employed by comparing information obtained from village officials, social assistance facilitators, and beneficiary households. This strategy strengthened the validity of the findings by ensuring consistency across multiple data sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Furthermore, prolonged engagement in the field, careful documentation, and continuous verification were undertaken to improve the dependability and confirmability of the research, thereby providing a comprehensive representation of the social realities surrounding the implementation of social assistance programs in Samaturue Village (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Positive Impacts of Social Assistance

Improvement of Economic Welfare

Economic welfare is one of the primary indicators used to assess the effectiveness of social assistance programs because it reflects households' capacity to satisfy basic needs and access essential economic resources (Collins et al., 2021; Rifka Alkhilyatul Ma'rifat & Suraharta, 2024b). Interviews with the Secretary of Samaturue Village revealed that social assistance has not substantially improved household living standards. Instead, the assistance mainly functions as a short-term coping mechanism that enables poor households to survive rather than creating sustainable economic independence. This perception was reinforced by the Head of General Affairs, who explained that most beneficiaries spend the assistance on food, daily household necessities, and urgent expenses, leaving little opportunity for productive investment.

The findings suggest that social assistance in Samaturue Village primarily serves as a social safety net rather than an economic empowerment instrument. Similar findings were reported by Arum and Digdowiseiso (2023), who found that PKH benefits are predominantly allocated to immediate consumption rather than income-generating activities. Likewise, Rifka Alkhilyatul Ma'rifat and Suraharta (2024a) concluded that food assistance alone is insufficient to reduce poverty without complementary empowerment programs. Indawati (2022) also demonstrated that cash transfers during the COVID-19 pandemic successfully protected household consumption but produced limited long-term economic transformation. These findings support the argument that sustainable welfare improvement requires integrating social assistance with livelihood development, skills training, and productive economic programs (Collins et al., 2021).

Reduction of Household Economic Burdens

Another positive impact identified is the reduction of household financial burdens. Village officials explained that beneficiaries primarily use assistance to purchase food, pay electricity bills, finance children's education, and meet urgent household expenditures. According to the village social assistance facilitator, although the amount received is limited, the assistance significantly reduces financial pressure, particularly among vulnerable

households experiencing unstable incomes. Several beneficiaries similarly acknowledged that BPNT, PKH, and BLT enabled them to maintain minimum consumption levels during periods of economic hardship.

These findings corroborate previous studies demonstrating that social assistance effectively cushions short-term economic shocks. Annisa (2024) found that social assistance programs substantially alleviate the financial burden of poor households and improve their daily living conditions. Likewise, Ruslan et al. (2022) reported that cash assistance effectively reduces economic vulnerability despite continuing targeting challenges. Similar conclusions were reached by Hakim et al. (2024), who emphasized that the protective function of social assistance is particularly evident among economically vulnerable households. Therefore, the findings reinforce the role of social assistance as an essential component of Indonesia's social protection system.

Strengthening Social Solidarity

Beyond economic benefits, social assistance has contributed to strengthening social solidarity within the village community. Village officials explained that the distribution process encourages cooperation among residents through mutual assistance in completing administrative requirements, exchanging information regarding distribution schedules, and helping elderly beneficiaries access assistance. Beneficiaries also reported that receiving assistance often involves collaborative interactions that strengthen neighborhood relationships.

These findings align with the concept of social capital, which emphasizes that trust, reciprocity, and social networks contribute to community resilience (Maulana, 2024). Similar observations were reported by Putnam (2000), who argued that collective participation strengthens social cohesion and facilitates cooperation within communities. Social assistance therefore generates not only economic benefits but also positive social externalities that reinforce community solidarity and collective resilience during periods of economic uncertainty.

Maintaining Household Economic Stability

Social assistance also contributes to maintaining household economic stability, particularly among families dependent on informal employment with unstable incomes. Village officials explained that assistance helps households avoid borrowing money for basic necessities and allows families to manage monthly expenditures more effectively. Beneficiaries likewise acknowledged that regular assistance provides financial certainty that supports household budgeting.

These findings are consistent with Nurafni (2022), who found that social assistance contributes significantly to household socio-economic stability among vulnerable populations. Similar conclusions were reported by the World Bank (2022), which emphasizes that well-targeted social protection programs improve household resilience against economic shocks. Consequently, social assistance plays an important stabilizing role despite its limited contribution to long-term poverty reduction.

Negative Impacts of Social Assistance

Dependency on Social Assistance

Although social assistance provides important economic support, interviews indicate the emergence of dependency among a portion of beneficiaries. Village officials reported that some residents become dissatisfied when excluded from beneficiary lists, reflecting expectations that government assistance should continuously support household consumption. However, many beneficiaries also emphasized that they continue working because assistance alone cannot meet all family needs.

These findings correspond with Khoerunisa and Widiastuti (2023), who found that prolonged assistance may foster passive attitudes among certain recipients. Nevertheless,

Hakim et al. (2024) argue that dependency varies considerably according to local socioeconomic conditions and should not be generalized. The findings therefore indicate that dependency exists only among a limited proportion of beneficiaries rather than representing a universal consequence of social assistance.

Work Motivation

Another concern frequently associated with social assistance is its potential influence on beneficiaries' motivation to work. While several village officials acknowledged isolated cases of declining work motivation, social assistance facilitators observed that most beneficiaries continue working because the assistance remains insufficient to support household livelihoods independently. Beneficiaries themselves consistently stated that employment remains their primary income source.

These findings contradict the assumption that social assistance necessarily discourages labor participation. Similar results were reported by Kementerian PUPR et al. (2023), which found that PKH improves household welfare without significantly reducing beneficiaries' willingness to work. International evidence also suggests that well-designed conditional cash transfer programs rarely generate substantial labor disincentive effects (World Bank, 2022).

Social Jealousy

The most prominent social consequence identified was the emergence of social jealousy among residents who were not selected as beneficiaries. Village officials explained that dissatisfaction generally arises from limited public understanding regarding eligibility criteria and beneficiary selection procedures. The social assistance facilitator emphasized that transparent communication and continuous public education have reduced tensions, although complaints still occur.

These findings are consistent with Purba et al. (2024), who found that perceptions of unfairness frequently trigger social jealousy among non-beneficiaries. Likewise, Arimbi (2022) argued that improving the quality of the Integrated Social Welfare Database (DTKS) is essential for enhancing targeting accuracy and reducing community conflict. Therefore, strengthening transparency, updating beneficiary data, and increasing community participation are critical for improving public trust in social assistance programs.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that social assistance programs in Samaturue Village, Tellulimpoe Subdistrict, Sinjai Regency have produced both positive and negative impacts on community welfare. The Bantuan Pangan Non Tunai (BPNT), Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH), and Bantuan Langsung Tunai (BLT) programs have contributed to improving beneficiaries' ability to meet basic needs, reducing household financial burdens, strengthening social solidarity, and maintaining household economic stability, particularly among low-income families with unstable livelihoods. These findings indicate that social assistance has played an important role as a short-term social protection mechanism by helping vulnerable households cope with economic hardship and reducing the immediate effects of poverty.

Nevertheless, the study also found several challenges that may reduce the long-term effectiveness of social assistance, including the emergence of dependency among some beneficiaries, perceptions of declining work motivation, and social jealousy caused by perceived inequities in beneficiary selection. These findings suggest that social assistance alone is insufficient to achieve sustainable welfare improvement. Therefore, the effectiveness of social assistance should be strengthened through more accurate beneficiary targeting, regular updates of the Integrated Social Welfare Database (DTKS), greater transparency in the distribution process, and stronger integration of social assistance with community empowerment, skills development, and income-generating programs. Such measures are expected to transform social assistance from a short-term safety net into a more sustainable

instrument for poverty reduction and community welfare improvement.

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