Australian National University

Deservingness in Indonesia's Social Assistance Policy: Social Protection for All?

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of
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Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university. To the best of the author's knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

I declare that I have used artificial intelligence (AI) tools, specifically Grammarly and Claude, solely for editing assistance, as English is my second language. I used AI tools to check grammar, improve clarity and refine language. This thesis's intellectual content, analysis, arguments and original ideas are entirely my own work. These AI tools were used in a manner consistent with ANU's guidelines on academic integrity and were employed similarly to traditional editing tools. No AI tools were used to generate content, analyse, or develop arguments.

Vania Kristiani Budianto
February 2025

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"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" Romans 8:28

I always believed that pursuing a PhD was my "calling," but I never anticipated that writing and completing a thesis would be the most challenging task I would ever face. At the beginning of my journey, I encountered significant hurdles, including the uncertainties of COVID-19 and the separation from loved ones. The most difficult aspect was the solitary nature of a PhD project, which challenged me as an extrovert. Though I am the sole author of this thesis, the success of my PhD journey is rooted in the unwavering support of remarkable people and institutions I met along the way. Although many individuals and institutions have contributed to this thesis, I am solely responsible for its contents and any errors or lapses in judgment.

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Abstract

As reflected in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, social protection is widely recognised as a critical component of development strategies. While developing countries have rapidly introduced social assistance programs to alleviate poverty since the 2000s, a significant portion of the population in the Global South remains excluded. The 60% surge in social assistance programs in response to COVID-19 sparked optimism among international development stakeholders that countries in the Global South would bolster their commitment to expanding social protection. Nevertheless, recent trends indicate that this expansion was temporary, and vulnerable groups continue to face exclusion from these programs.

While existing research has evaluated social assistance programs and examined the influence of international organisations and domestic politics in their institutionalisation, few studies have investigated the concept of deservingness, which is critical to a country's political commitment to vulnerable groups (Leisering, 2018). This study adopts the notion of deservingness as a concept operating within a broad social context that gives meaning and determines consequences (Watkins-Hayes & Kovalsky, 2017). This thesis examines how deservingness influences patterns of inclusion and exclusion in social assistance programs for children, women, and the elderly in Indonesia.

Using Indonesia as a case study and applying the anthropology of policy approach, this research examines the underlying ideas in Indonesia's social assistance programs and how they reflect the construction of deservingness among these groups. It investigates how different policy actors influence the construction of target groups in social assistance programs. It explores the dynamics affecting national and sub-national policymakers in formulating programs and framing notions of deservingness. This study contributes to the literature by leveraging Indonesia's decentralised polity, where different levels of the government advance various schemes that reflect diverse notions of deservingness towards vulnerable groups. Through interviews, participant observation, and document analysis conducted virtually and in person during the COVID-19 pandemic, this study unpacks how socio-cultural values and hegemonic policy narratives influence state actors and shape policymaking in social assistance across different jurisdictions.

The overall argument of this thesis is that the construct of deservingness is not static but contested and dynamic. This research reveals how the interplay of socio-cultural values, externally driven policy paradigms, and state officials' bureaucratic, political and practical interests co-produce the conceptualisation of the "deserving poor" in different ways across

various jurisdictions. This thesis advances the following arguments: First, the dominant ideas of deservingness in social assistance emerge from the convergence of religious, gender and family norms with the hegemonic influence of the social investment paradigm, reinforcing a productivist framing of social assistance and forestalling a rights-based approach to social protection. Second, a dominant coalition of "liberal economic technocrats" within the national government bureaucracy shapes Indonesia's predominant poverty discourse, promoting a residual approach to social assistance that excludes specific vulnerable groups. Last, local-level socio-political dynamics lead to a complex and fluid concept of deservingness, often differing from national-level priorities, with local policy entrepreneurs playing a crucial role in aligning political goals with bureaucratic and practical interests. These three dimensions - societal norms, national technocratic approaches, and local political dynamics – interact and work in tension with each other, creating varying patterns of inclusion and exclusion in social assistance across different governance levels.

This research contributes to social protection literature by demonstrating how deservingness is dynamically constructed through the interplay of socio-cultural values, policy paradigms, and state officials' interests across jurisdictions. It complements existing studies on political economy and welfare change in Indonesia that focus on the changes in welfare institutions and actors and their interests. This research advocates for a more nuanced, context-specific understanding of deservingness in social protection policy. Policy discussions must extend beyond technical considerations to explore how prevailing socio-cultural values and hegemonic concepts of "social investment" and poverty can inadvertently exclude vulnerable populations. The thesis emphasises the need to consider domestic political dynamics, including elites' interests and state officials' diverse motivations in different jurisdictions. In the context of multi-level governance and distinct notions of deservingness, local socio-political dynamics can create opportunities for extending social assistance towards vulnerable groups left behind. As demonstrated in this thesis, local policy actors, operating within their bureaucratic and practical constraints, can respond to local political conditions, potentially leading to more adaptive and inclusive policy outcomes.

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List of Abbreviations and Glossary

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AFC	Asian Financial Crisis
Anak Yatim	Orphan Children
Anak Terlantar	Abandoned children
APBD	Anggaran Pendapatan dan Belanja Daerah (District Budget)
APBN	Anggaran Pendapatan dan Belanja Negara (State Budget)
ASLURETI	Asistensi Lanjut Usia Resiko Tinggi (Aceh Jaya's High-Risk Elderly Social Assistance)
ASLUT	Asistensi Usia Lanjut Terlantar (Assistance for Abandoned Elderly)
ATENSI	Asistensi Rehabilitasi Sosial (Social Rehabilitation Assistance – a Ministry of Social Affairs program to provide social rehabilitation for vulnerable communities, including to elderly and those with disability
Bappeda	Badan Perencanaan Daerah (Indonesia's Planning Agency at District or Province Level)
Bappenas	Badan Perencanaan Nasional (Indonesia's Ministry of Planning Agency)
BLT	Bantuan Langsung Tunai (Direct Cash Transfer)
BLT Desa	Bantuan Langsung Tunai Desa (Village Direct Cash Transfer)
BPK	Badan Pemeriksa Keuangan (Supreme Audit Office)
BPKP	Badan Pengawasan Keuangan dan Pembangunan (Financial Supervisory and Development Board)
BPJS Ketenagakerjaan	Badan Penyelenggara Jaminan Sosial Ketenagakerjaan (Social Security Administration Body for Employment)
BPNT	Bantuan Pangan Non-Tunai (Non-cash Food Assistance)
BPS	Badan Pusat Statistik (Central Bureau of Statistics)
Blusukan	Direct community visit
Bupati	District Head/Regent
CCT	Conditional Cash Transfer
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
Desa	Village (the lowest administrative level in Indonesia)
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australian Government)
DFID	Department for International Development (UK Government)
Dinsos	Dinas Sosial (Local Social Affairs Office)
DOKA	Dana Otonomi Khusus Aceh (Aceh Special Autonomy Fund)
DPR	Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat (Indonesian National Parliament)
DTKS	Data Terpadu Kesejahteraan Sosial (Unified Social Welfare Database)
Fakir Miskin	Destitute
FDS	Family Development Session (Component of PKH program)
FGD	Focus Group Discussion

Geunaseh	Gerakan Untuk Anak Sehat / Healthy Children Movement, Sabang's universal child grant
Gotong Royong	Community mutual assistance, a traditional Indonesian concept of reciprocal help
IDR	Indonesian Rupiah
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ILO	International Labour Organisation
JKN	Jaminan Kesehatan Nasional (National Health Insurance)
Kabupaten	District/Regency (administrative level between province and sub-district)
Kecamatan	Sub-district, an administrative level between the district and village
KK	Kartu Keluarga (Family Card)
KTP	Kartu Tanda Penduduk (National ID Card)
KUR	Kredit Usaha Rakyat (People's Business Credit)
KUSUKA	*Kartu Pelaku Utama Kelautan dan Perikanan* (Marine and Fisheries Business Actors Card)
MAHKOTA	Towards a Strong and Prosperous Indonesian Society
MOSA/Kemensos	Ministry of Social Affairs
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
Otsus	Otonomi Khusus (Special Autonomy)
Pak	Honorific for 'Mister' or 'Sir' in Indonesia, short for Bapak
PAD	*Pendapatan Anggaran Daerah* (Local Government Own-Source Revenue)
Panti	Orphanage
PEKKA	Perempuan Kepala Keluarga (Women Headed Households)
PGP	Provincial Government of Papua
PIP	Program Indonesia Pintar (Smart Indonesia Program)
PKH	Program Keluarga Harapan (Family Hope Program)
PKK	Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga (Family Welfare Empowerment program), a state-sponsored program that trains and mobilises women at the village level
PKSA	Program Kesejahteraan Sosial Anak (Children's Social Welfare Program)
PMT	Proxy-Means Test
PRAKARSA	*Masyarakat untuk Negara Kesejahteraan dan Pembangunan Alternatif (*Welfare initiative for Better Societies)
PUSKAPA	Centre on Child Protection and Wellbeing at Universitas Indonesia
PROLEGNAS	Program Legislasi Nasional (National Legislation Program)
RPJMN	Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Nasional (National Medium-Term Development Plan)
RPJMD	Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengan Daerah (Regional Medium-Term Development Plan)
Resos	Rehabilitasi Sosial (Social Rehabilitation)

SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SJSN	Sistem Jaminan Sosial Nasional (National Social Security System)
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
SSN	Social Safety Net
TNP2K	Tim Nasional Percepatan Penanggulangan Kemiskinan (National Team for Acceleration of Poverty Reduction)
UCB	Universal Child Benefit
UCT	Unconditional Cash Transfer
UDB	Unified Database for Social Protection Program
UMKM	Usaha Mikro, Kecil dan Menengah (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises)
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
Zakat	Almsgiving

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Chapter One: Social Assistance and Issues of Exclusion in Social Assistance Programs in the Global South

1.1 Background: the rise and paradox of social assistance in the Global South

In the late 1990s, the Global South experienced a significant shift in social policy, a profound change dubbed a "quiet revolution" (Hulme et al., 2010). This revolution centred on expanding social assistance programs, with governments providing direct cash or in-kind transfers to their citizens. The scale of this transformation became even more apparent during the COVID-19 crisis. By May 2021, 222 countries implemented 3,300 social protection measures worldwide, marking an unprecedented 200% increase since before the pandemic (Gentilini et al., 2021). Notably, 60% of these measures comprised social assistance in the form of cash or in-kind transfers.

In the Global South, most social assistance programs originated as crisis responses but have since evolved and become institutionalised as integral components of developing countries' social policy, with "poverty reduction" as the primary objective (Cook, 2013; Devereux & McGregor, 2014). Several factors contributed to the proliferation of social assistance in developing countries, including the failure of structural adjustment programs in Latin America, the Asian Financial Crisis (AFC), and the perception that "neo-liberal policies" had worsened poverty and human development outcomes (Cook, 2013).

Nevertheless, this "entitlement revolution" in the Global South has created a paradox. Despite the unprecedented expansion of social assistance programs, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) reports that more than 4.1 billion people – over 50% of the world's population – still lack adequate social protection coverage (ILO, 2021). This contradiction forms the core of my research: How can systems designed to protect vulnerable populations simultaneously exclude them?

While social assistance programs aimed to address social exclusion, they have inadvertently become sources of exclusion themselves (Cook, 2013). While researchers and development agencies have paid much attention to implementation challenges and technical aspects such as targeting mechanisms, this research focuses on exclusion due to a lack of legal entitlement as a product of the policy formulation process (Leisering, 2018). By examining how ideas of deservingness shape the construction of target groups in social assistance programs, this research aims to unravel the persistent issue of exclusion in the Global South's social protection landscape, focusing on Indonesia.

A rich body of literature on social protection reform in the Global South has explored various factors influencing the development of social assistance programs. First, the critical role of domestic politics (Barrientos, 2013; Tillin & Duckett, 2017), including the top-down elite-driven reform from studies of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (Hickey et al., 2020; Lavers & Hickey, 2015). Or the bottom-up approach where mass mobilisation triggers social protection reform, such as in Latin America (Cruz-Martínez, 2019; Huber & Stephens, 2012; Lavers, 2022). Another approach is to look at the historical context. (Cook, 2013; Koehler, 2011; Schmitt, 2020), such as Apartheid in South Africa (Ferguson, 2015), the failure of structural adjustment programs in the late 1990s, and the dynamics between different levels of government in implementing social protection policy (SPP) (Fenwick, 2016a; Lavers, 2022).

Second, the literature discussed global policy diffusion and policy entrepreneurs' role as instrumental factors in policy reform (Devereux, 2023; Ulriksen, 2019). Third, existing literature addressed the importance of ideas and discourse or ideational processes in social protection reform (Béland, 2016; Schmidt, 2010; Tomazini, 2019). However, a crucial gap remains in those socio-cultural values that are often overlooked: the role of sub-national government not only as policy implementers but also as policy innovators and how the construction of deservingness shapes social assistance programs. This research aims to fill this gap, mainly focusing on the context of Southeast Asia, as much of the literature is focused on Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and South Asia.

Indonesia provides a compelling case study for this phenomenon, chosen for its unique historical, political and economic context. Like many Southeast Asian countries, Indonesia significantly expanded its social protection system, particularly social assistance, following the 1998 Asian Financial Crisis. However, despite two decades of program expansion, gaps in coverage persist, with various vulnerable groups experiencing different forms of exclusion. Using data from 2021, ILO's World Social Protection Data Dashboard reported that 54.3 % of the total population is covered by at least one social protection benefit[1] (ILO | Social Protection Platform, n.d.). However, exclusion among different vulnerable groups remains pertinent as most of the target population groups do not receive any social protection program, social assistance or social insurance.[2]

[1] This figure does not include the health insurance coverage of social protection which has 90% coverage and the government subsidised health insurance for the bottom 40 % of the population.
[2] The coverage for children, maternity, and the elderly is 43.6%, 29.4%, and 31.2%, respectively (ILO 2024). However, the details of these numbers do not reflect the specific coverage of social assistance for individuals as most of Indonesia's social assistance programs are household-based.

This research seeks to understand how and why the dynamics influencing the policy formulation process can lead to patterns of inclusion and exclusion in social assistance programs. By focusing on the construction of deservingness for different population groups – specifically children, women, and the elderly – this study offers new insights into the complex dynamics shaping social protection policies in Indonesia and the broader Global South.

This chapter concerns the persistent issues of exclusion in social assistance programs as a global phenomenon in developing countries' SPP. I will discuss the different types of exclusion in social assistance programs and consider why exclusion due to a lack of entitlement (Leisering, 2018) is under-studied in the literature of social protection policy reform in the Global South. To illustrate the exclusion issues empirically, I will introduce Indonesia as my case study and discuss the progress of Indonesia's social protection policy since the national government introduced different social assistance programs. I will then outline my research, including my research questions, objectives, contributions and reflexivity. I will end the chapter with a map of this thesis.

1.2 The persistent issues of exclusion in social assistance programs

In classifying different types of exclusion in social assistance, the World Bank (2020) categorises exclusion as either "de facto" – when eligible households or individuals do not receive it, or "de jure" – when individuals or households are not entitled to benefits by design. The latter is often termed "exclusion errors" in social protection discourse or people "falling through the cracks" in the system (Hanna & Olken, 2018). "Inclusion error" refers to households or individuals who do not meet the criteria but receive a social assistance program.

"De facto" exclusion stems from implementation issues and program design. Relatively weak government in developing countries leads to operational or implementation problems such as political clientelism, elite capture, targeting inefficiencies, lack of information and corruption. (Akerkar et al., 2016). Administrative challenges, such as the lack of legal documents of potential recipients and the limited capacity of local government to update administrative data, exacerbate this issue of exclusion. Mkandawire (2005) notes that such "exclusion errors" are often unavoidable in poverty-targeted social assistance programs where "poverty is rampant, and institutions are weak" (Mkandawire, 2005, p.15). While the weak capacity of government in developing countries is unavoidable, it is often the design of social assistance programs that can generate exclusion.

Program design, mainly targeting approaches, can also cause exclusion. With the limited fiscal capacity, especially in developing countries, governments must target specific groups. "Poverty targeting" is a common way of targeting social assistance in developing countries, as the government often frames it as a poverty reduction initiative. Methods such as "means-testing" or "proxy-means-test" (PMT) are used to target "the poor". However, poverty-targeted assistance with limited coverage tends to produce exclusion errors (Kidd, 2017; Mkandawire, 2005). Another common targeting approach is "categorical targeting" of vulnerable groups such as women, the elderly, people with disability or children. However, this type of targeting can be considered fairer but less effective in addressing poverty (Devereux et al., 2017).

Targeting inevitably leads to exclusion, regardless of approach. While often framed as technical, targeting is fundamentally a political decision (Devereux et al., 2017). Policymakers justify it as a "redistributive" social policy by providing higher benefits to individuals or households in the lowest quantile compared to those at the upper income distribution. However, cost-effectiveness typically drives implementation (Mkandawire, 2005). Targeting remains controversial due to its inherent inaccuracies and debates over beneficiary selection.

While most literature in the Global South, especially studies funded by international agencies, focuses on "de facto" exclusion, less attention has been paid to "de jure" exclusion, when a person, household, or particular population groups are not entitled to social assistance. While it is often hard to separate the de facto and de jure exclusion, as existing studies have focused more on the program design and implementation issues that generate exclusion, there is a lack of studies that look at exclusion caused by the "lack of legal entitlement" (Leisering, 2018). The limited legal entitlement assigned to particular population groups and the lack of political commitment by the government indicate the different notions of "deservingness" in the country towards different population groups.

Existing studies have examined the varying political commitments to social protection reform in Global South countries, as will be further discussed in Chapter Two. Most scholars who explore the politics of social protection reform have highlighted the importance of domestic politics (Barrientos, 2013; Lavers & Hickey, 2021; Tillin & Duckett, 2017). One study focuses on distributional politics and social protection reform in the Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) region, highlighting two critical domestic factors that led to expanding social assistance to the poor: meaningful political competition and distributional crises (Hickey and Lavers, 2021). The elite-driven approach in the SSA region contrasts with the increasing political commitment in Latin America and South Asia, driven primarily by bottom-up citizens' political mobilisation and redistributive demands (Lavers, 2022). Lavers (2022) emphasised how rights-based framing

and political mobilisation in these regions drove the adoption and implementation of social assistance.

Meanwhile, Tillin and Ducket (2017), while highlighting the importance of domestic politics, also noted how historical roots have shaped the level of political commitment towards social policy. They compared Brazil, China, India, and South Africa, highlighting how countries have developed different shapes and outcomes in social policy, despite facing similar economic crises, structural adjustments, and transitions to democracy amid globalisation. However, these studies have not explicitly examined how domestic politics leads to varying political commitments towards vulnerable population groups due to the policy formulation process.

Given this gap in the literature around the issues of exclusion due to limited political commitment towards population groups (Leisering, 2018), research is needed on how social assistance policy formulation leads to a pattern of inclusion and exclusion in social assistance. Furthermore, many existing studies focus on the technical aspects of targeting mechanisms (Alatas et al., 2012; Bah et al., 2019; Devereux et al., 2017). In contrast, this research examines the rationales and political processes shaping categorical targeting. This research focuses on the politics and policymaking process in social protection policy (SPP) in developing countries to understand why there are still exclusions, especially in expanding social assistance.

1.3 Indonesia as a critical case for examining exclusion in social assistance

Indonesia presents a compelling case for examining the paradox of persistent exclusion in social assistance programs in the Global South. Indonesia's contemporary social protection landscape has been shaped by distinct political and economic periods that established the institutional foundations influencing today's social assistance programs. Table 1.1 outlines these key historical phases and their implications for social protection development.

Table 1.1: Indonesia's Political and Economic Evolution and Social Protection Development

Years	Period	Key Characteristic	Social Protection Implications
Pre-1945	Dutch Colonial	Colonial administration	Social protection for the Dutch
1945-1966	Post-Independence (Soekarno Period)	Guided democracy, nation-building, and anti-Western Nationalism	Informal security regime, reliance on traditional community mutual aid *(gotong royong)* and family network
1966-1998	New Order or *Orde Baru* (Suharto Period)	Centralised authoritarianism; developmental state, economic growth focus	Social protection was primarily for state employees, with limited coverage for the general population

1997-1998	Asian Financial Crisis (AFC) & Fall of Suharto	Economic collapse, political upheaval, regime change, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank structural adjustment program	Crisis revealed inadequate social protection; emergency social assistance programs were introduced through Social Safety Net *Jaring Pengaman Sosial* (JPS: 1. Subsidised rice for the poor (OPK), 2. A work creation program (*Padat Karya*) 3. Scholarship for school children and block grants for schools 4. Health card for the poor
1998 – present	*Reformasi* / Democratisation	Democratic transition, direct elections, political liberalisation	Electoral competition led to social protection expansion for voter mobilisation; the institutionalisation of social assistance programs targeting "the poor"
Early 2000s - present	Decentralisation	Transfer of authority to regional government, local autonomy. Direct election for Province and District Heads (2004)	Local government started to introduce local social assistance programs; multilevel governance created variation in coverage and approach across regions

Sources: Sumarto (2017); Murphy (2019); Sumarto & McCarthy (2025)

This historical trajectory demonstrates how Indonesia evolved from a system serving primarily state employees during the New Order period to broader social assistance coverage following Reformasi, while decentralisation created opportunities for local policy innovation.

Several features of Indonesia's social, political, and institutional context make it particularly valuable for understanding why exclusion persists despite program expansion. First, Indonesia exemplifies a fundamental contradiction in social assistance reform: significant program expansion has coexisted with the systematic exclusion of vulnerable groups. Following the 1998 Asian Financial Crisis, the fall of President Suharto and his New Order regime and subsequent democratisation, Indonesia transformed its social protection system from one that primarily served state employees to a broader system that included non-contributory social assistance and contributory social insurance programs. The expansion in social assistance included major initiatives such as the *Program Keluarga Harapan* (PKH), a conditional cash transfer and the *Sembako* food assistance program that targets 10 to 16 million households. However, the ILO World Social Protection Dashboard (International Labour Organisation, n.d.) reveals that 45.7% of the population remains uncovered by any social protection benefit.

Indonesia's transition from informal to formal social protection systems reveals complex dynamics of exclusion. Historically, those outside formal sector employment relied on informal social protection from families and communities (Kwon & Kim, 2015; Sumarto, 2017). The introduction of formal social assistance programs has created new forms of exclusion, particularly for groups like women, the elderly, and people with disabilities who are often "excluded by design" from program eligibility (OECD, 2019; World Bank, 2020; TNP2K, 2018). This raises important questions about how program design decisions create systematic patterns of exclusion.

Second, Indonesia's multi-level governance structure following democratisation offers unique insights into how exclusion manifests across different political contexts. The country's decentralisation reforms that started in the early 2000s following the *Reformasi* meant that regional governments, mainly at the district level, gained more authority in policymaking, powers that had previously been concentrated in the central government (Rosser and Wilson, 2012). Additionally, since 2004, Indonesia has implemented direct elections for district heads, expecting local leaders to be more responsive to citizens' needs. This electoral system was designed to incentivise regional leaders to be more responsive to the needs of citizens (Rosser & Wilson, 2012). However, the results have been mixed regarding how decentralisation, especially at the district level, has effectively produced more pro-poor policies, including health, education and social policy (Rosser & Wilson, 2012; Wardhana, 2018).

While Indonesia’s social assistance programs are initiated mainly by the national government, decentralisation allows sub-national governments not only to implement national programs but also to initiate social assistance programs at the local level. This institutional arrangement has produced varying patterns of inclusion and exclusion across jurisdictions. Some local governments have developed social assistance programs to reach excluded groups or have introduced policy models that diverge from the national government's approach. This variation within a single country allows one to examine how different political and institutional factors within the same polity contribute to patterns of exclusion.

Third, Indonesia's experience highlights how resource constraints interact with policy choices to produce exclusion. Despite recent increases in social protection spending to 2.35% of GDP, direct social assistance receives only 1.02% – significantly lower than neighbouring countries like the Philippines (3.8%), Thailand (7.6%), or Vietnam (7.6%) (Indrawati et al., 2024). However, fiscal constraints alone cannot fully explain patterns of exclusion. The government's choice to allocate significant resources to fuel and electricity subsidies, 2.8% of GDP in 2022

(Ihsan et al., 2024), rather than direct assistance to vulnerable groups, suggests that other factors influence decisions about who receives support.

The persistence of exclusion in Indonesia's social assistance system presents a crucial analytical puzzle. While existing research, particularly by development economists and international agencies, has focused on technical aspects of program implementation and efficiency, there remains limited understanding of why certain groups are systematically excluded from social assistance. This gap is particularly significant given Indonesia's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) goal of "leaving no one behind." Understanding why exclusion persists despite program expansion requires examining the underlying factors that shape social assistance policy formulation, including how different groups are constructed as deserving or undeserving of support.

1.4 Current research: research objective, research questions, and significance of the research

In summary, Indonesia's social assistance programs have emerged and rapidly expanded since the early 2000s. With this expansion, we might expect vulnerable groups to be entitled to social assistance programs. However, many vulnerable groups are "excluded by design" from social assistance programs. This study aims to understand how the policy formulation process can lead to a pattern of inclusion and exclusion in social assistance programs.

In my research, I adopt the concept of deservingness to analyse Indonesia as a case and examine how prevailing socio-cultural values, policy discourses, and the role of policy actors shape and reshape who is deemed 'deserving' of support. I delved into the construct of “deservingness” to understand the issues of exclusion by design in social assistance. Leisering (2018) defines deservingness as a "socially constructed, contested, and subject to change" (p.37), a concept that profoundly influences a country's commitment to social protection and the specific groups targeted for social assistance.

Studies on social protection reform in the Global South have focused on how political settlement influences the emergence of social assistance programs (Lavers & Hickey, 2015; Rosser & Murphy, 2023). However, existing studies seldom explicitly examine how political dynamics influence notions of deservingness that lead to the issues of exclusion towards different target population groups. Further, while some have highlighted the importance of ideas in institutionalising social protection systems (see the work of Lavers and Hickey, 2015), as pointed out by Leisering (2018), there is still a lack of discussion on how ideas of

deservingness influence the construct of target population groups in social assistance programs.

1.4.1 Research questions

To complement existing research, the main research question for this study is "How do notions of deservingness influence the inclusion and exclusion of different target groups in social assistance?" To answer this central question, this thesis considers three questions:

- What are the underlying ideas in Indonesia's social assistance programs, and how do they reflect notions of deservingness among different target groups?
- How do different policy actors influence the construction of target groups in social assistance programs?
- What dynamics influence national and sub-national policy actors in framing notions of deservingness in social assistance programs?

In answering the research questions, this study adopts an interpretative approach to studying policy, as Chapter Three discusses. This study aims to unpack the complexity of the policymaking process in social protection policy. Further, using the anthropology of policy, this study aims to reveal the different contestations and hegemony happening in the social protection policy space that can lead to the exclusion of varying target population groups. This study will use three population groups to analyse the empirical chapters: children, women, and the elderly, and how they are constructed in Indonesia's social assistance policy.

1.4.2 Research significance

This study aims to make significant theoretical and empirical contributions to understanding social protection policymaking and how exclusion happens. Theoretically, it addresses a noted scarcity of studies with academic ambition in theorising social protection reform in the Global South, a field often dominated by international organisations focusing on program implementation (Leisering, 2018; Barrientos, 2013). My research builds on existing literature highlighting the importance of aligning domestic political interests with the institutionalisation of social protection reform. This study investigates the nuanced role of domestic politics at different levels of government by analysing national and sub-national social assistance programs. In terms of policy actors, while existing research focuses on the role of international agencies as policy entrepreneurs, my study examines the crucial role of bureaucratic actors as policy entrepreneurs at the national and sub-national levels in formulating social assistance

policy. It explores how these actors navigate different discourses and competing political and bureaucratic interests to make decisions that align with the broader political landscape.

Further, this research builds on existing works concerning the importance of ideas in social policy reform and the role of discourse and framing in social protection. While previous studies have discussed the influence of social investment paradigms on poverty reduction strategies in the Global South, this study advances knowledge by analysing how socio-cultural values shape ideas of deservingness, leading to patterns of inclusion and exclusion in social assistance. Examining target population groups as case studies offers a novel approach to analysing different notions of deservingness.

Moreover, this study contributes to a field often dominated by cases from Latin America, SSA and South Asia by focusing on Indonesia and offering insights into the specific context of Southeast Asia. It moves beyond the typical analysis of how social assistance programs are implemented and whether they achieve their intended impacts (Booth et al., 2019; Cahyadi et al., 2020; Hanna & Olken, 2018), and expands current knowledge on the political economy of social protection in Indonesia Existing studies have highlighted how the external shocks (like the AFC crisis), domestic political interests, and the role of international agencies have shaped Indonesia's welfare regime. My study advances the current understanding of how "deservingness" shapes Indonesia's policy decisions in social assistance at national and sub-national levels.

This research offers a unique and nuanced perspective on social assistance exclusion in Indonesia. It combines empirical rigour with theoretical depth and aims to fill critical gaps in the literature and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of social protection policy in the Global South.

1.5 Reflexivity

As an interpretive researcher, this research is about understanding the experience and perspectives of those involved in the policymaking process and my experience as the observer or researcher (Hendriks, 2007). Hence, as an interpretive researcher, reflexivity is required as my background will influence how I interpret the data in this research. While familiarity with the context can give me an advantage, I need to know my positionality. This includes my professional experience working in Indonesia's social protection policy since 2016 as a Senior Program Manager at the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

(DFAT)[3] and my theoretical interest in how the formulation of social assistance policy can affect poor people's lives whether they receive or do not receive the programs. This experience, which includes extensive engagement with policymakers and policy practitioners, provides me with valuable insights into the complexities and nuances of the social assistance landscape in Indonesia. However, I acknowledge that my prior experience might influence how I interpret and produce data. I will discuss my strategy further in Chapter Three.

1.6 Thesis outline

This thesis comprises eight chapters. The introductory chapters (One–Three) set the stage for the empirical analysis in Chapters Four–Six, which examine the construction of deserving children, women and the elderly in social assistance. Chapter Seven synthesises the findings and answers the critical research questions and cross-case analysis. Chapter Eight concludes the thesis with theoretical contributions and implications and outlines future research directions and policy implications.

The next chapter explores the significance of "deservingness" in shaping social assistance policymaking in the Global South. It argues that while a political economy analysis is essential, it alone cannot fully explain the institutionalisation of social protection. By drawing on three interconnected streams of literature – the political economy of social protection, the role of policy actors, and the importance of ideas or ideational change – this chapter identifies a gap in the existing research regarding the role of state officials at both national and sub-national levels in formulating social assistance policy. It aims to fill this gap by examining how political dynamics and ideas, particularly notions of deservingness, influence their decision-making. This chapter will ultimately establish the concept of deservingness as the main conceptual framework for analysing the patterns of inclusion and exclusion within social assistance programs in Indonesia.

Chapter Three details the research design for investigating how ideas of deservingness influence the formulation of social assistance programs. It outlines adopting an interpretative approach, utilising the "anthropology of policy" framework to analyse national and sub-national policies. The chapter explains the selection of children, women, and the elderly as multiple case studies, with "target groups" as the unit of analysis. Additionally, it describes the data

[3] From 2016 to January 2020, I was the Senior Program Manager at the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). My role was to manage the Australian-Indonesian bilateral program called MAHKOTA (Towards a Strong and Prosperous Indonesian , which focuses on providing support to the Indonesian government in social protection policy. I have existing relationships with various government and non-government stakeholders working in the social protection space.

collection strategy, which involves a "multi-site" approach to track policy across global, national, and sub-national levels, acknowledging the limitations posed by COVID-19. The chapter concludes by discussing data analysis methods and addressing researcher reflexivity, considering the author's prior experience in Indonesia's social protection policy space.

Chapter Four is the first case study where I examine how children are constructed and targeted within Indonesia's social assistance programs, focusing on how Indonesia adopted and institutionalised two global policy models in social assistance: Conditional Cash Transfer (CCTs) and Child Benefit. The chapter analyses the differing success of these approaches at the national and sub-national levels, which children are excluded due to a dominant notion of deserving children, and factors that explain this notion of deserving children.

Chapter Five explores how women are constructed and targeted within Indonesia's social assistance programs. This chapter addresses how prevailing gender norms influence notions of deservingness, how women are constructed in dominant discourse regarding their reproductive and productive roles, and how this affects patterns of inclusion and exclusion in social assistance programs. I specifically problematise how the lack of social protection for those who work in the informal sector disproportionately affects women more than men.

Chapter Six examines how varying ideas of deservingness are constructed for the elderly within Indonesia's social assistance programs, investigating why different levels of political commitment exist across jurisdictions. In this chapter, I examine national government social assistance programs for the elderly. At the national level, I examine why and how Indonesia differs from the global trend of expanding social assistance for the elderly. At the sub-national level, I use three case studies of district elderly social assistance in Aceh Jaya, Bintan and Badung. I will examine why there are varying outcomes for elderly social assistance programs and who the main drivers of social assistance programs are at the sub-national level. This chapter's multifaceted analysis reveals a complex interplay of factors that shape the construction of deservingness for the elderly and influence their access to social protection in Indonesia.

Chapter Seven addresses the research questions by synthesising critical themes from the case studies. In this chapter, I revisit the research questions and present my overall arguments for this thesis. This chapter analyses how the interplay of socio-cultural values, transnational ideas, and political and institutional interests reveals the complex dynamics that shape the construction of target groups within social assistance programs and notions of deservingness in Indonesia. Chapter Eight concludes the thesis, reiterating the critical arguments of the

thesis, summarising the essential findings, and presenting the limitations and critical implications for future research and policy.

1.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has set the stage for an in-depth examination of the complex issue of exclusion in Indonesia's social assistance programs. By situating the research within the broader context of global social protection trends and Indonesia's specific challenges, this study aims to shed light on the underlying factors that shape deservingness and influence social assistance policymaking. The following chapter will delve into the existing literature on social protection reform in the Global South, analysing the role of domestic politics, policy actors, and ideational processes in social protection policy. It will then examine notions of deservingness as a conceptual framework. Ultimately, this research seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of social protection in the Global South and inform efforts to create more inclusive and equitable social assistance policies.

Chapter Two: Constructing Deservingness: Politics of Social Protection Reform in the Global South

2.1 Background

Despite significant expansion since the 2000s, social assistance programs in Indonesia continue to exclude many vulnerable groups (OECD, 2019; Rosser & van Diermen, 2016; TNP2K, 2018; World Bank, 2020b). This study builds on Leisering's (2018) approach to exclusion, focusing on how differential political commitment towards various population groups can lead to exclusion, particularly in policy formulation. The concept of deservingness shapes these commitments (Leisering, 2018), and it serves as a powerful set of ideas through which policymakers formulate social assistance policy. This thesis demonstrates how notions of deservingness in social assistance are contested and dynamic.

This chapter situates this research within the vast literature on the politics of social protection policy in the Global South. Existing research has examined different ways of framing how countries institutionalised social assistance programs as part of the broader social protection reform and what influences the pattern of inclusion and exclusion towards different target population groups, such as the role of domestic politics, policy actors and importance of ideas (Hickey & Lavers, 2015; Ulriksen, 2019; Tillin & Duckett, 2017). However, there remains a gap in the literature on how the process shaping political dynamics, socio-cultural values and transnational ideas influence how bureaucratic actors' perceptions of deservingness influence the formulation of social assistance programs.

This chapter explains why this thesis adopts notions of deservingness as a framework for examining social assistance policymaking. This thesis focuses on how notions of deservingness, shaped by political dynamics, socio-cultural values, and historical legacies, play a crucial role in explaining these patterns of exclusion and inclusion. This research draws from Lutz Leisering's (2018) analysis of cash transfer entitlements in the Global South. Leisering (2018) argues that "ascribed deservingness and unequal political commitments" (p.7) create an uneven distribution of social assistance entitlements within and across countries. Policy actors across different government jurisdictions construct, contest and mobilise deservingness to justify their policy choices and decide which groups should receive priority in social assistance programs. Scholars have studied social assistance policy across different contexts, mainly from Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (Devereux, 2016; Hickey et al., 2020; Lavers, 2022), Latin America (Fenwick, 2016; Cruz-Martínez, 2019) and South Asia (Koehler, 2011). We still need a deeper understanding of how policy actors apply notions of

deservingness in policymaking and how these ideas influence the design of social assistance programs in the Southeast Asia region.

Using Indonesia as a case study, this thesis examines how notions of deservingness shape social assistance programs at both national and sub-national levels. The final section of this chapter examines how the existing literature discusses Indonesia's social protection reform, including how domestic politics, the role of policy actors, and different ideas and discourses influence the institutionalisation of social assistance programs.

The following section will investigate the literature on the politics of social protection reform in the Global South, examining how different political dynamics, historical legacies and institutional arrangements shape the construction of deservingness and ultimately influence the outcomes of social assistance programs.

2.2 How do domestic politics influence the institutionalisation of social assistance programs?

Existing literature highlights domestic politics' crucial role in shaping how governments institutionalise social assistance programs. While the global rise of poverty reduction agendas has undoubtedly spurred the expansion of social assistance, domestic political dynamics deeply influence the diversity of these programs' design, implementation and targeting (Barrientos, 2013). Researchers have discussed the importance of domestic politics in institutionalising social assistance programs. Comparative studies, such as Tillin and Duckett (2017), examined social policy in Brazil, China, India, and South Africa. They found that despite similar economic circumstances and global integration, each country's domestic political factors produce different outcomes in social policy (Tillin & Duckett, 2017).

First, in the last decade, those examining the politics of social protection reform in the Global South highlighted the importance of the country's political economy in explaining the diversity of how social protection policy is institutionalised. Hickey and Lavers (2015) have been influential in advancing the understanding of how domestic political economy drives elite commitment to social protection. Their work adopted a political settlement framework to offer a valuable tool for analysing how the configuration of power relations, institutional arrangements, and societal interests within a country influences the design and expansion of social assistance programs (Lavers & Hickey, 2015).

Applying this framework, Hickey and Lavers (2015) have revealed distinct patterns. In dominant coalition settings, such as East Asia, social assistance programs often align with

broader developmental goals, emphasising long-term investments in human capital and savings (Hickey et al., 2020). Conversely, in competitive clientelist systems, common in SSA, social assistance is frequently deployed as a short-term political tool to secure votes and maintain power (Lavers & Hickey, 2021). This highlights how the nature of political competition and elite interests can significantly shape the types of programs adopted and the populations they target.

While Hickey and Laver's framework provides valuable insights into how political dynamics shape social assistance programs, it has yet to capture the complex interplay between the actors involved. It tends to focus on elite interests, which, in the case of Indonesia, do not get involved in the technical details of formulating social assistance programs, policy models or deciding target population groups. This work also has not yet fully captured the role of informal institutions, such as the role of religious institutions or traditional community structures, in influencing the emergence of social assistance programs.

In contrast to the top-down approach or the elite-driven dynamics observed in some Sub-Saharan African contexts, the expansion of social assistance in Latin America, parts of South Asia, and South Africa followed a bottom-up approach led by the citizens' movement. The expansion of social protection in these regions is often attributed to democratisation, political mobilisation, and citizen-led demands for social rights (Lavers, 2022). For instance, strong social movements and a history of left-leaning politics in Latin America have played a crucial role in pushing for more inclusive and universal social protection systems (Huber & Stephens, 2012; Cruz-Martínez, 2019). A study on social policy expansion in India and China found that mass mobilisation triggered social protection reform despite the different political regimes between the two countries (Ho et al., 2022). India has a democratic government, while China has an authoritarian government. Similarly, the post-apartheid era in South Africa saw a significant expansion of social assistance, driven in part by the need to address historical injustices and fulfil the promises of a new democratic order (Ferguson, 2015). The "unconditional" or "categorical" nature of these programs reflects the specific political and economic context of South Africa, where structural unemployment and inequality remain persistent challenges (Leisering 2021).

Second, understanding the historical context is critical for comprehending the diverse trajectories of social assistance programs across the Global South. Leisering's (2021) comparative analysis of social protection in Brazil, India, China and South Africa underscores the importance of historical legacies and ideational processes in shaping policy choices. Sarah Cook (2013) highlighted how historical conditions could determine a country's social contract,

which determines a country's social protection policy. Recent work by Carina Schmitt (2020, p.139) highlighted how social assistance programs are a product of the colonial legacies, which continue to determine today's social policy development. Schmitt (2020) analysed data from 100 low-and middle-income countries, focusing on British and French colonial influence. In South Asia, for example, the shared historical legacy of social development programs enshrined in the constitutions of several countries has contributed to a greater acceptance of rights-based approaches to social protection and the emergence of innovative social assistance initiatives (Koehler, 2011). Furthermore, India's employment guarantee scheme that links social assistance programs to work requirements is a legacy of Famine Codes in India's colonial times (Lavers, 2022, p.10).

Third, while much of the existing literature focuses on national-level politics, the dynamics between different levels of government also significantly influence the institutionalisation of social assistance. Tracy Fenwick's (2016) comparative study of Brazil and Mexico highlights how the interactions between national and sub-national actors shape the success of national government conditional cash transfer programs. Tillin and Pereira (2017) discussed how the claim for credit between different levels of government in Brazil and India led to different outcomes in social policy. They highlighted the need to understand the patterns of a party system, nationalisation, and fiscal centralisation in the federal system, focusing on institutional arrangements. The critical role of sub-national government in institutionalising social protection has increasingly received attention in the studies of social protection reform in the Global South. Lavers (2021) compiled different studies on the multi-level government in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, many of which recognised the importance of the State's capacity to deliver social protection and how the distribution of social assistance programs cannot avoid politics at the local level (Lavers, 2021). However, further work is required to examine how policy actors in different jurisdictions use different ideas for their political benefits in expanding social policy.

In summary, existing research has made significant strides in understanding the role of domestic politics in shaping social assistance in the Global South. It highlights the challenges and opportunities of expanding social protection programs amidst diverse socio-political contexts and competing claims for resources in developing countries. Understanding a country's history could also explain the diversity of the social protection system, the different social assistance policy models adopted, and which target groups are prioritised by the policy actors. Studies on the politics of social protection reform have also increasingly recognised the vital role of sub-national governments in implementing social protection policy in the Global South. However, further work is required to examine the dynamics at different government

levels and explain patterns of inclusion or exclusion towards various groups. Existing research tends to focus on the central level. However, further studies need to examine how local contexts and state officials can influence the formulation of social assistance programs as part of the broader political dynamics of decentralisation. Further, emerging research on the politics of social protection reform focuses its analysis on SSA, Latin America and South Asia. However, there is still a scarcity of studies focusing on these dynamics in Southeast Asia.

2.3 Policy actors in social assistance policy: the importance of coalitions, policy entrepreneurs and epistemic communities

Political elites and types of political settlement drive the adoption and expansion of social assistance programs in the Global South (Lavers & Hickey, 2015). However, these elites typically engage only with broader policy directions and not in the intricacies of program design, particularly for specific target groups. This section delves into the instrumental role of a broader coalition of policy actors, often called "policy entrepreneurs" (Ulriksen, 2019), who introduce social assistance policy models and formulate policy designs for these programs in social protection literature in developing countries. Marianne Ulriksen (2019) adopted Hall's work on policy entrepreneurs in England to a developing country context, encompassing international experts, national policy experts, and domestic public servants operating outside the traditional "elite" political sphere. Before delving into the role of domestic policy actors, I first examine the role of international agencies, which often act as the leading "policy entrepreneurs" or the "transnational actors" (Hickey & Lavers, 2015) or the "knowledge brokers" in the initial stages of policy adoption. Subsequently, this section will delve into the importance of policy coalitions, including the interactions between policy entrepreneurs, epistemic communities, and state actors in the institutionalisation process. Finally, the last section will explore the pivotal role of state officials in ensuring the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of social assistance programs.

One of the critical policy actors in institutionalising social assistance programs in the Global South that makes it distinct from industrialised countries is the role of international development agencies. International development agencies have the financial leverage (Lavers, 2022) and technical expertise to promote policy models in social assistance programs, depending on the institutional focus and interests. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have introduced the idea of a social safety net in developing countries to protect the people from the impact of structural adjustment programs (Cook, 2013). However, international agencies have a limited role in institutionalising social assistance programs, especially in countries where the national budget funds the social assistance programs. Literature that discusses social protection reform in Sub-Saharan Africa

often focuses on these international agencies as they provided funding and conducted pilot programs (Devereux, 2023; Seekings, 2021).

While development agencies like the World Bank and UN agencies broadly agree that social assistance is a crucial tool for poverty reduction, as articulated in the SDGs, they lack consensus on what approach to social assistance can best achieve this objective. Naila Kabeer (2014) characterises this tension as a "long-standing divide between universal and residual approaches" (p.338). Even though there are multiple ways to look at the concept of "universalism" (Leisering, 2018), a standard definition of universalism in social protection means that it "covers the entire population with adequate benefits and is founded on claimable entitlements, whether derived from rights or by institutions and individuals" (UNRISD, 2010 cited in Kabeer, 2014). The proponents of this "universal" approach frame social protection as "human rights". In contrast, the residual approach targets its efforts to the "deserving and needy" or the "poorest". Esther Schüring (2021) observed this as the ILO's "rights-based" approach versus the World Bank's "need-based" approach. In recent years, this divide has become quite blurred, as the international agencies are trying to align themselves with a commitment such as "social protection for all", especially with the push from the SDGs. However, they are still quite prescriptive with their preferred models of interventions.

The World Bank, underpinned by neoliberal principles, has historically championed a residual approach to social assistance, promoting targeted interventions primarily aimed at the "poorest." This approach is evident in their early emphasis on "Social Risk Management" (SRM) and "social safety nets," which focused primarily on alleviating income poverty through targeted measures. To operationalise this approach, the World Bank has been instrumental in promoting and shaping the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) model, a program design that has become widespread in the Global South (Peck & Theodore, 2015). The organisation actively developed and promoted the technical tools and knowledge necessary to implement CCTs, including guidelines for poverty targeting through Proxy Means Testing (PMT) and rigorous impact evaluations to demonstrate the effectiveness of these programs (de Sardan & Piccoli, 2020). These efforts were motivated by the World Bank's broader poverty reduction agenda in developing countries, often linked to loan conditionalities (Von Gliszczynski & Leisering, 2015).

In contrast, UN agencies like the ILO and UNICEF have championed a rights-based approach, advocating for a more comprehensive and inclusive social protection system (Seekings, 2019). The ILO's "Social Protection Floor" concept aims to guarantee a minimum level of social security for all citizens, including access to essential healthcare, basic income security, and

social services (International Labour Organisation, 2011). On the other hand, UNICEF has been a strong advocate for universal child grants or family allowances, recognising the specific vulnerabilities of children and the importance of investing in their development (Von Gliszczynski, 2015). UNICEF advocates for a child grant or a universal child benefit as it is aligned with “equality and non-discrimination” principles based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations, 1989). UNICEF and the ILO provided an alternative model to the World Bank's poverty-targeted approach that links entitlement to conditions. The rights-based approach emphasises social assistance as a fundamental entitlement for all, regardless of economic status, and promotes social inclusion and equality.

Further, the role of international agencies has been instrumental in devising normative models of social assistance since the early 2000s, which were then applied to developing countries (Von Gliszczynski & Leisering, 2015). However, how each country adopts each of these models varies. In Von Gliszczynski and Leisering’s study (2015), international agencies act as "knowledge actors" who produce standard policy models and provide lending and technical assistance. They classified international agencies that formulate the four global policy models: social pensions, family allowance, conditional cash transfer and general household assistance, as reflected in Table 2.1. Their analysis focuses on the World Bank, ILO, the British Government’s Department for International Development (DFID or now FCDO), UNICEF and Help Age International. However, these international agencies analysed by Von Gliszczynski and Leisering’s studies mainly focus on the African region, and researchers have not yet discussed the role of international agencies in other regions, including Southeast Asia.

Table 2.1: Social assistance global policy models and international agencies

Global Policy Models	Description	Assumptions on the Agency of the Poor	Main Agency to Advocate
Social Pensions	Non-contributory assistance for the elderly	Older persons as agents in their households (via grandchildren)	HelpAge International
Family Allowance / Child Allowance	Regular benefits for poor families with children, based on the vulnerabilities of children (child-sensitive social protection)	Children as vulnerable; Children contributing to future economic growth	UNICEF
Conditional Cash Transfer	Cash Transfers to poor families are only paid when families send their children to school and health check-ups.	The poor as rational agents (but bounded rationality); Children as future economic agents	World Bank
General Household Assistance	Non-categorical cash benefits	Reduced ability to self-help (referring to the poorest of the poor, defined as	None (Unclear)

		labour-constrained households)	

Source: Von Gliszczynski and Leisering, 2015

Besides multilateral agencies, foreign government aid agencies have also invested in influencing social protection reform in developing countries. DFID is the most prominent foreign government that actively influences social protection reform in the Global South (Von Gliszczynski & Leisering, 2016). Their role is notable in the politics of social protection reform in the Sub-Saharan Africa region (Hickey et al., 2020; Lavers & Hickey, 2021; Seekings, 2021). Other foreign governments investing in social protection reform in the Global South include the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), which focuses its development assistance on Southeast Asia and the Pacific region. The global development literature has limited discussions on the role of the Australian government. Specifically looking at the role of DFAT in Indonesia, Wilmsen et al. (2017) discussed how the Australian government attempts to be a "constructive partner" rather than a "demanding donor" in influencing Indonesia's social protection system by influencing Indonesian government governance structures (see also Datta, et al., 2014).

Despite the instrumental role of international donor organisations in building developing countries' "technical capacity" in social protection and supporting initiatives such as various social assistance pilot programs and technical assistance, it is still unclear to what extent international actors can influence the political contestation inherent in a country's social protection reform process. The critical role of domestic policy actors and the resources of international organisations has led to social protection reform, which will be discussed in the next section.

2.3.1 Policy coalitions: the role of policy entrepreneurs and epistemic communities

Given their limitations in influencing the domestic political processes, international agencies often form policy coalitions with domestic policy actors. The politics of social protection cannot be attributed to a single actor; it involves multiple actors working together, with key roles played by "policy entrepreneurs" (Lavers and Hickey, 2015). This concept, borrowed from Kingdon's (2011) work on public policy in the Global North, helps explain how reform happens through coordinated actions. In Tanzania, for example, Ulriksen (2019) shows how policy entrepreneurs, both international experts and domestic public servants, work in coalitions to identify policy problems, propose solutions, and build support for implementation. These entrepreneurs draw on international experiences but adapt them to a local context, often

promoting specific approaches like conditional cash transfers or social pensions (Foli et al., 2018).

Studies on the role of policy coalitions between international agencies and domestic policy actors mostly came from the context of Sub-Saharan Africa. Devereux (2023) highlighted the role of individuals or international consultants as key policy entrepreneurs in Africa. However, Kate Pruce (2019), in her work on social protection reform in Zambia, illustrated how social protection reform was more than just the role of policy entrepreneurs; there was a wide range of actors forming coalitions and contributing to formulating social protection. In Zambia, international and local policy entrepreneurs often play brokering and advocacy roles, such as introducing policy actors to the political elites or transnational actors to the global social protection epistemic community (Pruce, 2019, p.220).

While important, the role of policy coalitions can achieve varied results in social protection reform. According to Hickey and Lavers (2021), coalitions are ineffective due to two factors. First, coalitions were less effective when there was competition between leading international agencies, such as between the World Bank and DFID in Sub-Saharan Africa. Second, the policy coalitions were more effective when the international agencies worked with more powerful ministries, such as the Ministry of Finance, compared to weaker ministries with limited power, such as the Ministry of Social Welfare. However, even when policy coalitions are effective, they need to be able to introduce the ideas to the elite political decision-makers and address the political elites' concern about the ideas of "deservingness" (Lavers & Hickey, 2021, p.9).

Policy coalitions significantly shaped Latin America's social assistance landscape, especially in institutionalising CCT, a policy model that emerged from the region. Tomazini (2019) categorised "advocacy coalitions" in Brazil and Mexico based on different ideologies: human capital, unconditional income and food security. The forming of coalitions was domestically driven and involved various groups of policy actors in each coalition. Domestic actors, such as politicians, government officials, economists, policy experts or NGOs, drove the formation of domestic policy coalitions involving different groups. While there was a lack of consensus among these coalitions, they agreed to promote CCT as a policy instrument (Tomazini, 2019). Policy instruments like CCT can be what Béland and Cox (2016) described as a "coalition magnet", a policy idea that can mean different things to different policy actors. The role of ideas will be further discussed in the next section.

"Epistemic communities", described in Western social policy (Haas, 1992), also actively shape the social protection agenda in the Global South through coalition building. These communities consist of expert networks with a common understanding of the policy domain. Schwegler (2011) argues that their expertise and ability to legitimise policy choices through scientific evidence and technical knowledge significantly influence policy decisions. In the work on pension reform in Mexico, Schwegler (2011) illustrated how the World Bank staff and senior government officials in Mexico City belong to the same epistemic communities as they shared educational credentials, which were PhDs from US and European universities, and where they attended the same global policy networks and international conferences. However, Schwegler (2011) highlighted that despite the senior state officials sharing the same ideological background as the World Bank, domestic political interests mainly drive their policy decisions.

While most international development literature and social protection policy reform examined the role of international agencies, analysis in the Global South has not yet paid specific attention to the State or bureaucratic actors. In Brazil, bureaucratic actors played an influential role in ensuring the continuity of the CCT program against changes in the domestic political and economic landscape (Fenwick & Rennó, 2023). Fenwick and Rennó (2023) highlighted that the policy capacity of state actors in Brazil supported the CCT as they noted that the bureaucratic actors were "More than just public servants, these individuals are human agents; designers of systems, objects and rules of procedure; and carriers of knowledge" (p.15). Further, the state actors or bureaucrats with specific technical expertise, the "technocrats", can play a significant role in policy change (Ho, 2022). Ho (2022) underlined how technocrats often belong to specific technical expertise areas such as nutrition, economics or education, which inform their ideologies and, in turn, their actions, motivations and policy decisions. Ho (2022) pointed out the instrumental role of Indonesian technocrats in advocating nutrition policy in Indonesia when the issue was initially not in the interest of political elites.

While existing literature has begun to examine the role of Western-educated bureaucratic actors within transnational epistemic communities in shaping social protection reform (Peck & Theodore, 2015), we need to understand more about the contributions of local state officials at the sub-national level, particularly those who may not be part of these elite networks. Although research increasingly recognises the critical role of regional actors in implementing national programs (Fenwick, 2016; Lavers, 2022; Seekings, 2023), their role in designing and formulating social assistance policy at the local level remains under-examined. This thesis addresses this gap by focusing on domestic policy actors at national and sub-national levels, investigating how they operate as "policy entrepreneurs" and how their respective epistemic communities influence their decisions, and if they do not belong to particular epistemic

communities, what factors drive their policy decisions. By delving into the micro-level dynamics within state institutions, this research will shed light on state actors' motivations, strategies, and constraints, ultimately illuminating how their decisions in policy contribute to the inclusion or exclusion of specific population groups and shape the institutionalisation of social assistance programs.

2.4 The critical role of ideas in social protection reform in the Global South: ideational change

The literature on expanding social assistance programs in developing countries has also focused on the role of ideas (Lavers and Hickey, 2015; Leisering, 2021). Drawing on the broader social policy literature and political economy studies, these studies recognise the importance of ideas in challenging existing literature that focuses too much on "institutions" and promoting policy reform (Béland, 2005). Ideas enable policy actors to narrow down issues on the policy agenda, legitimise policy proposals through economic and social assumptions, and even challenge existing institutional arrangements. Political coalitions used underlying ideas such as nationalism, developmentalism, socialism, or opposition to communism to differentiate one political coalition from others (Hickey & Lavers, 2015). Building on work by Béland (2005) and Schmidt (2010) on discursive institutionalism, Hickey et al. (2020) find three key types of ideas: policy ideas, problem definition and policy paradigm. Policy ideas provide specific solutions to defined social problems; policy definitions frame social issues in ways that favour specific policy solutions, and paradigms serve as overarching political philosophies that guide policy approaches (Hickey et al., 2020).

Another way to look at ideas is to look at the multi-layered and dynamic nature of ideas in shaping social protection policy outcomes to provide an alternative to using a single broad idea like values or ideologies (Leisering, 2021). Leisering's comparative study of Brazil, China, India, and South Africa further illuminated the role of ideational change in institutionalising social assistance, where he identified the ideational fabric of multiple layers of ideas in social policy from concrete welfare institutions to abstract notions of social responsibility, with frames as a cross-cutting dimension (Leisering, 2021, p.23). The layers of ideas, from concrete to abstract, include collective social responsibility, social questions, policy paradigms, social problems, and welfare institutions. Each layer can be used to analyse a country's commitment to welfare. Each dimension has different political areas, political actors and ideational logic (Leisering, 2021, p.25).

Further, policy actors can use ideas to frame social protection policy, indicating how such problems might be resolved (Hickey & Lavers, 2016). Frames play a crucial role in policy formulation by linking social policy categories to broader cultural and ideological narratives (Béland, 2016). Different framing strategies have accompanied the expansion of social assistance in the Global South. Rana Jawad (2019) categorised the three main discourses in social protection policy: Social Risk Management (SRM), Social Justice or Social Contract and Institutionalisation. This social protection discourse examines the different conceptualisations of poverty and their implications for social protection policy. The first is the World Bank's "Social Risk Management" (SRM) discourse, which is aligned with a residual approach. It views poverty as an individual risk and promotes targeted interventions like CCTs (Jawad, 2019).

In contrast, the "social justice/social contract" discourse emphasises social assistance as a right and advocates for a more transformative approach to poverty reduction (Devereux et al., 2011; Hickey, 2014). The social justice and social contract discourse assumes that poverty reduction initiatives must link with policies to address broader structural and socioeconomic reform (Jawad, 2019), hence advocating social protection as a social right of citizens. ILO and other UN agencies promote this discourse, yet struggle to gain traction in developing countries due to weak citizen demand and fragmented societies (Gough, 2011). Meanwhile, the "institutionalisation" discourse offers a middle ground, focusing on reforming state institutions and ensuring collective provision through fiscal policies (Jawad, 2019). However, this discourse still primarily targets the "poorest" and may not fully address the structural causes of poverty.

While Jawad's categorisation provides a valuable framework for understanding different approaches to social protection, it may not fully capture the nuanced ways these discourses interact and resonate in specific national contexts or at the sub-national level. For example, how do policymakers in developing countries like Indonesia navigate between these sometimes-conflicting discourses? Furthermore, this categorisation might overlook country-specific discourses that do not neatly fit into these global categories. For example, how do the existing socio-cultural values and norms interact with or challenge the externally driven global discourse, such as human rights or social investment.

Another important underpinning idea that reflects state support in social assistance is the idea of "deserving" and "non-deserving" poor. Distinctions of deserving and undeserving poor influence how a country institutionalises social protection reform, and which global policy models are adopted and institutionalised. This thesis aims to contribute to this literature

(Leisering, 2018; Gugushvili et al., 2021; Hossain, 2005; Pruce, 2023), by examining how policy actors in Indonesia mobilise different frames, narratives, and discourses about poverty and deservingness to rationalise the inclusion and exclusion of various population groups in social assistance programs. It will analyse how socio-cultural values, transnational ideas, and the power dynamics between actors shape these discourses and ultimately influence policy outcomes. By focusing on the interplay between ideas, actors, and institutions, this research will offer a more nuanced understanding of how deservingness is co-produced from these different dynamics that lead to the outcome of social assistance programs towards various groups. The following section will explore how existing literature has used the concept of deservingness to explain the institutionalisation of social assistance programs.

2.5. Reviewing deservingness and social assistance

This study employs deservingness as a lens to understand patterns of inclusion and exclusion in social assistance programs. It builds upon Leisering's (2018) argument that ideas of deservingness are socially constructed, contested, and subject to change, influencing a country's commitment to social protection and the specific groups targeted. Further, Watkins-Hayes and Kovalsky (2017) conceptualise that deservingness operates within a broader social context that shapes its meaning and consequences, which are tightly linked to how poverty is understood.

Analysing notions of deservingness complements existing analysis that focuses on the traditional political economy and political settlement approach. This traditional approach focuses on redistribution and the role of political elites (Leisering, 2018). Leisering (2018, 2021) broadened this perspective by highlighting the significance of "social recognition", where he argued that social policy is not solely about material redistribution but also about recognising social problems, groups, and the State's responsibility for citizen well-being. This "recognition approach" necessitates an analysis of socio-cultural foundations and processes of social definition, including the construction of deservingness.

Existing studies investigating the ideas of deservingness are mostly from industrialised countries regarding their social policy and public perceptions of welfare recipients (Gugushvili et al., 2021; van Oorschot, 2006). The origin idea of "deserving poor" came from the Elizabethan British Poor Law of 1834 which differentiated between the "deserving poor" categories, such as the elderly, the sick and children, as opposed to "undeserving poor" including the unemployed and those capable of work (van Oorschot, 2006, p.23). Most literature on social policy and the perception of the deserving poor focuses on the public perception and attitudes towards welfare deservingness, such as the work of Van Oorschot

(2006) and Gugushvili and colleagues (2021). However, this thesis will not focus on citizens' perceptions but instead on the perceptions of the policy actors who formulate and design social assistance policy. In some developing countries like Indonesia, there is limited public awareness of citizens' rights to social assistance, as there is not yet a consensus between the State and citizens on their rights to social protection. Hence, this research focuses on policy actors and the dominant discourse on deservingness where they operate.

While the concept of deservingness offers valuable insights into social assistance policy formation, its application in Global South contexts requires careful consideration. The notion of deservingness, rooted in Western welfare state literature, may not fully capture the complexities of social relations and state-society dynamics in countries like Indonesia. For instance, how does the concept of deservingness interact with local notions of social obligation, religious values, or community solidarity prevalent in many Global South countries? Moreover, the focus on deservingness might inadvertently reinforce a residual approach to social assistance, potentially overlooking arguments for more universal or rights-based approaches. This raises questions about the applicability of Western-derived concepts in diverse cultural and political contexts and highlights the need for more nuanced, culturally sensitive frameworks for analysing social assistance policies in the Global South.

The literature on social protection reform in the Global South, especially the politics of social protection, has started to adopt the deservingness framework and apply it to look at the institutionalisation of social protection in SSA and the South Asia region. Naomi Hossain (2005) was one of the early academics who explored the concept of "deserving poor" and the perceptions of elites in Bangladesh. Her study found that the elite's perception of "deserving poor" is not necessarily those who are "the poorest" but based on their economic "productivity" potential. Hence, this notion of deservingness based on economic productivity has led to the elites' preference to prioritise non-disabled men at productive ages for assistance. Men were prioritised not because the elites were prejudiced against women but because assisting the men was to help the whole household (Hossain, 2005). This study highlighted the importance of understanding socio-cultural values, including gender norms that reflect particular notions of deservingness.

Research on social protection reform in countries in the SSA region also reveals the complex interplay of deservingness perceptions and social assistance policy. Seeking's (2019) study in South Africa showed that people identified the same groups as deserving recipients, regardless of whether the support came from the state or family members. Importantly, this alignment in deservingness perceptions did not mean that state support replaced family

obligations: instead, both forms of support were viewed as necessary. Meanwhile, Hickey and Bukenya (2019) observed in Uganda that the concept of "vulnerable groups" is more palatable than assisting the "undeserving poor" due to elite concerns about dependency. However, framing social assistance for the elderly as a matter of dignity proved more acceptable. Hickey and colleagues (2020) further emphasise the importance of understanding how long-standing ideas of deservingness intersect with broader socioeconomic changes in shaping social protection policies across East and Southern Asia.

The studies above highlighted the importance of discursive framing of deservingness that can drive or hinder the expansion of social assistance towards different groups. Policy actors mobilise different ideas of deservingness in each context and setting based on the local context, including socio-cultural values, a country's historical roots, and dominant underpinning ideas. The policy actors mobilise different ideas of deservingness to justify their approach to institutionalising social assistance programs.

This research builds on Kate Pruce's (2023) work on social assistance in Zambia to understand the complex interplay of policy actors and notions of deservingness. Pruce (2023) highlighted the primacy of perceptions of deservingness over technical assessments in shaping social assistance policies. Following Pruce's (2023) approach, this study highlights the multifaceted factors influencing deservingness perceptions, including socio-cultural values, transnational ideas and the political interests of various actors. By examining these factors in the Indonesian context, this research aims to better understand how deservingness is co-produced and operationalised in the Global South. By understanding how notions of deservingness are constructed, this research hopes to provide input to those who advocate for more inclusive social assistance programs in the Global South.

This research addresses several gaps in the existing literature. First, it contributes to understanding deservingness in the Global South and its interaction with social protection policy. While studies like Hickey et al. (2020) and Seekings (2019) have explored deservingness in Sub-Saharan Africa, this research delves deeper into the multi-level dynamics shaping deservingness in Indonesia's polycentric nature of governance. Hence, this research examines policymaking dynamics at the national and sub-national levels. Second, this study explores the socio-cultural influences on deservingness. Existing literature has yet to explore fully how socio-cultural values, such as religious beliefs, gender norms, and family expectations, shape notions of deservingness and influence social assistance policy design, particularly in Indonesia. This research will investigate how policy actors strategically mobilise these values to justify formulating social assistance programs. Third, it examines the influence

of the social investment paradigm on notions of deservingness and the institutionalisation of social assistance programs. While the dominance of this paradigm is acknowledged, its impact on constructing deservingness in social assistance programs remains under-examined. This study will analyse how this paradigm, emphasising human capital and economic productivity, interrelates with existing socio-cultural values to produce a notion of deservingness in social assistance.

Finally, this study addresses the multi-level governance aspect of deservingness. Unlike much existing research focusing on national-level policymaking, this research will examine how notions of deservingness may differ across national and sub-national levels due to varying political dynamics, institutional arrangements and socio-cultural values, as Pruce (2023) emphasises the importance of considering local-level perspectives in understanding deservingness. It will compare and contrast how deservingness is constructed and operationalised at both levels. By addressing these gaps, this study will provide a more nuanced understanding of deservingness in the context of social assistance programs in the Global South, contributing to both theoretical and policy-relevant knowledge.

In the next section, I will turn to Indonesia as a case and discuss how the existing literature has discussed social assistance programs' policy adoption and institutionalisation.

2.6 Indonesia's social assistance programs: from policy adoption to institutionalisation of social assistance programs

This section investigates studies examining Indonesia’s social protection reform, focusing on the influence of domestic politics, including democratisation, historical legacies, and the dynamics between national and sub-national governments. It then explores existing literature that discusses the policy actors in social protection reforms, such as the role of international organisations and state bureaucratic actors in shaping social assistance policy. Finally, it examines the role of ideas and dominant discourse in Indonesia's social protection reform, highlighting the gaps in existing research and setting the stage for the analysis in subsequent chapters. Before delving into the political economy of social protection reform in Indonesia, I will summarise the evolution of Indonesia’s social protection reform and the issues of exclusion.

2.6.1 Historical overview of Indonesia’s social assistance programs

As much literature has discussed, various crises prompted the Indonesian government to introduce social assistance programs. First, the AFC led to the first generation of social assistance that emerged as a "social safety net" in the early 2000s (see discussion below)

(Kwon & Kim, 2015; Sumarto, 2017; Yuda, 2018). The schemes include subsidised rice, health insurance for poor families, scholarships for poor students, block grants for the poor, and cash for work. Second, the increase in global fuel prices around 2005 led to the Indonesian government introducing unconditional cash transfers. The Indonesian government had to remove the fuel subsidy and introduce the first cash transfer program called *"bantuan langsung tunai"* (BLT), or unconditional cash transfer (Kwon & Kim, 2015). While the government introduced BLT as a temporary and ad-hoc measure, BLT often rolls out whenever the President considers it a crisis. The 2005 BLT was introduced under President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY)[4]. His predecessor, President Jokowi, also used the BLT to respond to crises such as COVID-19, when the price of cooking oil increased or when El Niño hit Indonesia.

The next generation of social assistance programs started when the Indonesian government focused on reducing poverty under its development plan 2004 – 2009 (Kwon & Kim, 2015). Chapter Four will explain that the Indonesian government introduced the conditional cash transfer (CCT), *Program Keluarga Harapan* or the Family Hope Program, in 2007. While it started as a small pilot, the CCT is a social assistance program that has scaled up rapidly to 10 million households in 2018. Despite some reports calculating that Indonesia has 25 active social protection programs (The World Bank, 2020), these three programs in Table 2.2 are Indonesia's primary social assistance programs addressed in this thesis: food assistance, conditional cash transfer and school stipend program. However, the Indonesian government sometimes considered Indonesia's fee subsidy to Universal Health Coverage (PBI-JKN) social assistance instead of social insurance, as the government pays the premium for the bottom 40%.

[4] President SBY is Indonesia's Sixth President from 2004-2014.

Table 2.2: Indonesia's primary social assistance programs.

Program Type	Program Name	Implementing Agency	Timeline	Coverages
Food Assistance (previously food subsidy)	*Beras Miskin (Raskin)* / Rice for the Poor *Beras Sejahtera* (Rastra) / Prosperous Rice Bantuan Pangan Non-Tunai (BPNT) Kartu Sembako	Ministry of Social Affairs	1998 - Started as a rice subsidy program as part of the Social Safety Net (SSN) policy and transformed into rice in-kind transfer 2017 - transform into an electronic savings card	18.8 million households (2024)
Conditional Cash Transfer	Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH)	Ministry of Social Affairs	2007- Initially targeted pregnant mothers, toddlers and school-age children in poor households. In 2017, eligibility includes the elderly and people with disability in poor households	3.5 million households 2015 10 million households in 2018
School Stipend Program	Bantuan Siswa Miskin (BSM) Program Indonesia Pintar (PIP)	Ministry of Education	2008 introduced as BSM, during the President SBY era, became PIP In 2014, during President Jokowi's era	17,9 million students[1] (Target was 20 million households)

Despite Indonesia having expanded social assistance programs in the last twenty years, there are gaps in Indonesia's social protection system, including exclusions in social assistance programs. Existing literature from development economics, as noted above, has pointed out the issue of exclusion or inclusion error or "de facto" exclusion in Indonesia's poverty-targeting social assistance programs (Alatas et al., 2012; Bah et al., 2019; Sim et al., 2015).

More recent reports evaluating Indonesia's social protection have started acknowledging the pressing issue of "de jure" exclusion in Indonesia's social assistance programs. These population groups are "excluded by design" from receiving social assistance. For example, the World Bank (2020) highlighted that poor families without children in Indonesia are only eligible for food assistance programs and receive fee waivers for their health social insurance (PBI-JKN). Further, the OECD (2019) has highlighted how "women, children and the elderly" are most exposed to risks across the life-cycle. The World Bank (2020) also pointed out the need for the Indonesian government to expand social assistance to the elderly and people

with disability as part of “progressive universalism”, as existing programs only focused on social assistance for poor households with children. World Bank’s definition of “progressive universalism” emphasises that the “poor households” need to be prioritised as the “most in need”, but gradually, the system will reach everyone in the country (Action Contre La Faim et al., 2024). In the following section, I will discuss the political factors leading to Indonesia’s reform in social protection, including the expansion of social assistance programs.

2.6.2 The political economy of Indonesia's social protection reform: democratisation and decentralisation

Indonesia's social protection system underwent a significant transformation following democratisation, where the government started to broaden and institutionalise the social protection system to those considered the "deserving poor". During the New Order period, social protection primarily benefited government employees, the military, and the wealthy, neglecting those most in need (Ramesh, 2000; Murphy, 2019). Only after the fall of Suharto's New Order regime did the Indonesian government introduce social protection in SSN programs to minimise the impact of the Asian Financial Crisis that happened in 1998. Indonesia's introduction of the SSN was part of the IMF and World Bank's structural adjustment programs[5]. While considered social assistance programs, the SSN programs were in-kind transfers, such as the Rice Subsidy program or student scholarships for the poor. It was not until another fuel crisis in 2005 that the Indonesian government started introducing social assistance programs such as cash transfers, which I will further discuss in Chapter Four.

Scholars analysing Indonesia’s post-democratisation social protection system have characterised it through various theoretical lenses, particularly emphasising its “predatory” and “productivist” nature. First, despite expanding social assistance programs, scholars argue that Indonesia's post-democratic social protection system remains limited and often "predatory" (Rosser & Murphy, 2023; Rosser & van Diermen, 2016; van Diermen, 2018). The authors considered the social protection system as “predatory” because the programs primarily benefit those who can contribute to economic growth but neglect those most vulnerable (Rosser & Murphy, 2023). Van Diermen's (2018) analysis of Indonesia's welfare regime highlighted a shift from a productivist, informal, and predatory system under the New Order towards a more universalist, equalising, and formal system post-democratisation (post-1998). However, the

[5] Structural adjustment programs (SAPs) are economic reform packages imposed by international financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank as conditions for receiving financial assistance. According to SAPRIN (2004), SAPs are "intended to open up the political-economic system leading to a liberal economy" through measures such as privatization, trade liberalization, and reduced government spending.

regime retains productivist and predatory elements, with progress varying across different social protection areas. Her study found that the reform primarily improves social security and income protection, not food security (Van Diermen, 2018). However, these studies did not analyse in depth how this welfare regime influences the social assistance entitlement towards different groups.

Second, studies found that Indonesia's social protection policy is productivist, meaning that social policy is often subordinate to economic objectives (Rosser & van Diermen, 2016; van Diermen, 2018). This aligns with the broader trend in East Asia, where social policy tends to support economic growth, focusing on areas like health and education that contribute to human capital development (Holliday, 2005; Murphy, 2019; Wood & Gough, 2006). While this productivist framing of social protection provides some explanation of why Indonesia's social assistance targets poor families with children, it does not explain why the Indonesian government prefers to adopt Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) as a policy model but not a universal child grant, when both models target families with children.

Third, existing literature on Indonesia's decentralised polity has also looked into sub-national level programs instead of only focusing on national social assistance programs. The work of Mas'udi and Lay (2018) is one of a few studies that analyse several social assistance initiatives introduced by sub-national governments. They concluded that Indonesia's welfare landscape can be considered contested and pluralistic. Exploring local-level social protection and welfare provision, Mas'udi and Lay (2018) concluded that the concept of citizenship tied to the nation-state is relatively weak in Indonesia compared to other forms of identity and belonging, such as religious, ethnic, or indigenous affiliations. They suggest that the national welfare system struggles to function effectively due to conflicts and contestations with existing societal and community-based welfare models. However, their analysis does not compare the local social welfare programs with the national-level social assistance programs, and this research aims to fill the gap.

Meanwhile, Wardhana's (2018) research on the intersection of decentralisation, democratisation, and social protection offers valuable insights. Focusing on two districts in Central Java, Wardhana (2018) found that while expanding local social protection programs can enhance political elites' popularity, it does not guarantee success in all cases. Wardhana's study highlights the importance of considering Indonesia's diverse local contexts, including capacity, resources, and democratic development, when analysing social protection outcomes. He suggests that decentralisation can significantly improve local social protection if implementation challenges are addressed, potentially leading to more accountable and

transparent governance. However, there is still a gap in understanding how local government social assistance programs specifically target different population groups and how the role of ideas and state actors influences the institutionalisation of social assistance programs at the regional level.

In summary, this section has highlighted how existing literature examines Indonesia's welfare regimes and has characterised Indonesia's social protection as predatory, productivist and reliant on informal networks. Further, some studies have looked into existing local social assistance programs. However, these studies have yet to systematically examine how and why different levels of government frame ideas of deservingness that lead to inclusion or exclusion towards specific target population groups. The following section will discuss the key policy actors in Indonesia's social protection reform.

2.6.3 Policy actors in Indonesia's social protection reform: key national agencies and the importance of coalitions in formulating social assistance

Several studies have begun to examine Indonesia's social protection reform and the role of policy actors outside the political elites in Indonesia's social protection reform. The Indonesian political elites, such as the President and key politicians, embraced the poverty reduction agenda, especially after 2004 when direct election became part of Indonesia's democratisation process.

This literature highlighted the role of international agencies in Indonesia's social protection system, especially the World Bank and the Australian government's DFAT (Kwon & Kim, 2015; Peck & Theodore, 2015; Wilmsen et al., 2017). Studies highlighted that one of the critical junctures of Indonesia's social protection policy was when the World Bank introduced CCT to the Indonesian government to replace the unconditional cash transfer program, *or Bantuan Langsung Tunai* or BLT (Kwon & Kim, 2013; Sumarto, 2023). Meanwhile, Peck and Theodore (2015), in their book on CCT as a global travelling model, used Indonesia as an example of how a country like Indonesia did not just blindly adopt the CCT; there is a process of adaption or "mutation" of the global policy model based on negotiations with domestic actors. Peck and Theodore (2015) highlighted the role of Indonesian state officials who "received their graduate degrees in urban planning in US universities" (p.118), who had intense negotiations with the World Bank about incorporating the idea of the community development program into CCT.

Other studies focused on the dynamics between critical national-level agencies that influenced Indonesia's social protection reform (Datta et al., 2014; Kwon & Kim, 2015). Their work comprehensively looked at Indonesia's complex dynamics of social assistance policymaking,

including the different institutions involved. Two critical central government agencies stood out as the agencies that played a central role in designing and formulating social assistance programs: Bappenas *(Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan* Nasional or the National Planning Agency) and TNP2K *(Tim Nasional Percepatan Penanggulanan Kemiskinan or* National Team for Accelerating Poverty Reduction). President SBY's administration established TNP2K in 2010 under Vice-President Boediono, who brought his background as an economist to the institution's formation and early direction. These two agencies are perceived as the "technocratic agencies" compared to other agencies in social protection, such as the Coordinating Ministry of Human Development and Culture, which supposedly plays a coordinating role between agencies, or the Ministry of Social Affairs, as the implementer of most of Indonesia's social assistance programs. As this research is focused on policy formulation, the role of Bappenas and TNP2K will be mainly highlighted.

Bappenas is a key agency that has the role and mandate to develop Indonesia's poverty reduction strategy, including formulating and designing Indonesia's social assistance programs. Datta et al. (2014) analysed the institutional roles in social assistance policy and found that Bappenas played the role of planner, coordinator and evaluator of social assistance programs. In contrast, their study noted that despite being the main implementing agency of social assistance programs, the Ministry of Social Affairs has a relatively weak institutional capacity. The role of Bappenas is also essential because it coordinates support from international development agencies (Wilmsen et al., 2017). One of the main constraints of Bappenas is the limited financial and human resources, which require the agency to rely on technical assistance and international agencies to test and pilot social assistance programs (Datta et al., 2014).

In their work, Peck and Theodore (2015) explained how critical officials of the planning agencies were when negotiating with the World Bank on CCT.

> Senior civil servants from Bappenas, having benefited from a World Bank study tour of Mexico's Progresa programme, a conditional cash transfer conference in Turkey and a visiting fellow from the World Bank who shared lessons from conditional cash transfer programmes abroad, were largely supportive of the conditional cash transfer programme. In being receptive to overseas experiences, senior civil servants, especially, are seen, and see themselves, as smart and worldly. (Datta et al. 2014, p.34)

Another key agency involved in Indonesia's social protection reform is the team under the Vice-President's office: TNP2K, an ad-hoc institution often considered a government think tank (Fatonie, 2020). TNP2K is mandated to coordinate government efforts in poverty reduction, including designing and piloting social assistance programs (Datta et al., 2014).

Existing studies have highlighted how TNP2K's mandates often overlap with other agencies, especially Bappenas (Datta et al., 2014; Wilmsen et al., 2017). TNP2K is a quasi-government institution whose staff consists mainly of technical consultants funded almost entirely by the Australian government's bilateral programs[6] (Datta et al., 2014). TNP2K technical experts operate as government employees but receive higher professional salaries than regular public servants in traditional institutions like Bappenas or the Ministry of Social Affairs.

When the Indonesian government first created the poverty database, famously known as the Unified Database for Social Protection Programs or the UDB (*Basis Data Terpadu or BDT*)[7], it was set up under TNP2K from 2012 to 2015. The Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) then managed the UDB, later renamed DTKS *(Data Terpadu Kesejahteraan Sosial*) or Integrated Social Welfare Data. The differing capacities and resources of TNP2K compared to other implementing agencies like the Ministry of Social Affairs often create key constraints in Indonesia's social protection reform, including in the dynamic relationship with other agencies (see Datta et al. 2014, p.53 on the dynamics between TNP2K and other agencies).

While this existing literature has discussed the dynamics and interests of different agencies in the process of social protection reform in Indonesia, it has not fully addressed the extent to what the role of state officials in these agencies influences the discourse on Indonesia's social protection reform and what informs their ideas of deservingness in social assistance. The limited role of civil society in Indonesia's social protection reform has not been discussed thoroughly in the existing literature on this reform, especially the limited role of civil society in advocating social assistance towards different target population groups.

Understanding coalitions of policy actors offers crucial insights into Indonesia's social protection policy beyond just identifying individual agencies' roles. Rosser and Murphy (2023) advanced our understanding of social protection reform in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia. They classify actors into four coalitions: predatory elements, technocratic elements, progressive elements and political entrepreneurs (p.33), as summarised in Table 2.3. Rosser and Murphy's work focuses more on the political dynamics at the state level and on dominant national actors. However, their work provided a vital categorisation highlighting the diversity of actors and their interests and agendas that shape social protection policy, including in

[6] Australian government DFAT support to TNP2K since 2010 under several bilateral programs focused on social protection and poverty reduction: Poverty Reduction Support Facility (PRSF) from 2010 to 2018; MAHKOTA from 2015–2023: Pro-Aktif 2023 to 2025.
[7] Indonesia's poverty database consist of the poorest 40% households based on their income/expenditure level

Indonesia. It also underscores the need for further research to understand how these coalitions interact, how they influence policy choices, and how their actions contribute to patterns of inclusion and exclusion in social assistance programs.

Table 2.3: Classification of coalitions of actors

Coalitions of Actors	Who they are	Interests/Agendas in SPP
Predatory elements	Elites, senior officials, and some lower-level officials (e.g., in education or health)	Use social protection to promote economic development that benefits their own positions.
Technocratic elements	Government technocrats, international financial institutions (World Bank, IMF), and bilateral donors	Social protection should reduce poverty, build human capital, and be cost-effective. Favour market-based solutions.
Progressive elements	NGOs, labour organisations, left-wing parties, academics, UN agencies bodies such as the ILO and WHO	Advocate for expanded and equitable social protection to address poverty and inequality. Critical of market-oriented approaches.
Political entrepreneurs	Politicians at national and local levels (can be from other coalitions above)	Open to social protection reforms that can mobilise political support, often through populist or redistributive policies.

Source: Rosser and Murphy's (2023)

While the policy actors involved in social assistance reform are crucial, the ideas and discourses they employ to legitimise and shape policy choices are equally important. This section will examine the dominant narratives and frames underpinning Indonesia's social protection reform, focusing on how these ideas have been mobilised to construct and contest notions of deservingness, ultimately influencing the design and implementation of social assistance programs.

2.6.4 The dominant discourse and ideas in institutionalising Indonesia's welfare reform

Literature on Indonesia’s social protection reform has examined ideas and discourse influencing this reform. Three dominant discourses have shaped Indonesia’s social protection reform: the tension between needs-based and rights-based approaches, the persistence of informal welfare arrangements, and the influence of the global social investment paradigm. First, while Indonesia's social assistance programs have expanded in recent decades, they remain embedded within a discourse that emphasises a "needs-based" approach over a rights-based approach. The work exemplifies how the Indonesian government still uses the term "*bantuan social*" (social aid) for social assistance programs. It implies a discretionary and conditional support, requiring beneficiaries to prove their worthiness (Murphy, 2019).

Second, the historical dominance of informal welfare arrangements continues to influence contemporary social protection discourse. Western welfare states emphasise a formalised social contract between citizens and the state, with clear redistributive policies and universal entitlements (Croissant, 2004; Wagle, 2017). In contrast, Indonesia's welfare regime is fundamentally shaped by the principle of '*gotong royong'* (mutual assistance), creating a system that differs markedly from Western models**.** Sumarto (2017) describes *gotong royong* as a "thick" welfare institution that has provided comprehensive informal social protection for centuries, encompassing multiple forms of mutual assistance, including rotating credit systems (*arisan*), community healthcare (*Posyandu*), death insurance (*layatan*), and agricultural labour exchange (*sambatan*). This community-based system, rooted in moral obligation and generalised reciprocity, has historically filled social protection gaps, particularly in rural areas where formal state welfare was limited (Sumarto, 2017). This informal welfare tradition has deep historical roots that continue to shape contemporary deservingness concepts. Ingleson's (2015) analysis of welfare provision during the 1930s colonial period reveals how Indonesian middle-class charities established early patterns of determining "deserving" and "undeserving" poor based on moral grounds. This legacy continues to influence contemporary approaches.

This historical foundation of informal welfare continues to shape contemporary Indonesia. Indonesia's system remains heavily influenced by informal networks and community-based arrangements. Yuda and Kühner (2023) argue that informal networks, clientelism, and limited civil society mobilisation characterise Indonesia's welfare regime. Berenschot and colleagues (2016) demonstrate how these informal support systems fundamentally shape citizens' access to and perceptions of formal social services. This dynamic is particularly evident in how local leaders distribute assistance based on community-defined notions of deservingness rather than following centrally determined targeting criteria (McCarthy & Sumarto, 2018). Sumarto (2017) argues that this emphasis on informal community-based arrangements has contributed to the limited expansion of formal social assistance programs.

This tension between formal and informal welfare systems is further illustrated in Indonesia's attempts to implement universal social protection policies. Yuda (2018) observes that market and communitarian citizenship discourses dominate Indonesia's social protection landscape, overshadowing rights-based “social citizenship” approaches. This is particularly evident in implementing the National Social Security System (*Sistem Jaminan Sosial Nasional* or SJSN) and its health coverage component (*Jaminan Kesehatan Nasional* or JKN). The 2004 SJSN Law mandated the establishment of a comprehensive national social security system covering health insurance, work accident insurance, old-age insurance, pension schemes and death

benefits of all Indonesian citizens, representing a significant shift towards universal coverage.[8]However, Yuda (2018) highlighted how, despite the state's formal commitment through the 2004 SJSN Law, implementation has been slow and challenging, mainly due to the persistence of community-based approaches inherited from the Suharto era and the parallel development of market-based solutions.

Third, another dominant discourse in introducing social protection policy is the global influence of the social investment paradigm, which is an externally driven agenda. Further discussed in Chapter Four, the social investment paradigm emphasises human capital development. Authors have highlighted how Indonesia, similar to the Latin American countries, adopted conditional cash transfer because of social investment objectives (Kwon & Kim, 2015; Sumarto, 2023). Extensive literature has also discussed how international agencies, especially the World Bank, played an instrumental role in the introduction of the CCT idea to Indonesia (Kwon & Kim, 2015; McCarthy et al., 2023; Peck & Theodore, 2015), but further studies are required to understand how policy actors used socio-cultural values and the hegemony of poverty narratives to construct and legitimise notions of deservingness, especially towards specific target groups. This research aims to address this gap, exploring the multifaceted ways in which deservingness is shaped and operationalised in Indonesia's social assistance landscape.

In summary, this section analyses the discussions in existing studies regarding Indonesia’s social protection reform, particularly in the context of political changes, the role of critical technocratic actors and the dominant discourse and ideas that influence the reform. Scholarship needs to examine how these dynamics affect the construct of deservingness in social assistance, leading to a pattern of inclusion and exclusion towards different target population groups.

2.7 Conclusion

Current scholarship has extensively examined social assistance policy in the Global South, highlighting how domestic politics, policy actors, and ideas shape program design and implementation. While international actors and policy entrepreneurs play influential roles in promoting policy models, the success of adopting and institutionalising them depends on their alignment with domestic political interests, institutional arrangements, and socio-cultural

[8] Based on this Law, Indonesia established two main social security agencies: BPJS Kesehatan, which manages the Universal Health Coverage program (*Jaminan Kesehatan Nasional* or JKN), and BPJS Ketenakerjaan, which manages employment-related social security including work accident insurance, old-age security, and pension schemes.

values. To fill this gap, this research considers how these factors interact and shape notions of deservingness, which influence patterns of inclusion and exclusion in social assistance programs.

The concept of deservingness offers valuable analytical insights into understanding social assistance coverage. While Western social policy literature has applied deservingness to analyse public perceptions and welfare attitudes, several studies have examined how notions of deservingness influence social protection reform in the Global South, including in South Africa, Zambia and Bangladesh. However, this approach has yet to be systematically used to analyse social protection reform in the Southeast Asia region and Indonesia, especially in a multi-level governance context.

This thesis addresses this research gap by examining how Indonesia's decentralised context shapes varying notions of deservingness in social assistance policy. While existing research has explored how historical context and political economy dynamics influence Indonesia's welfare reform, there is limited understanding of how different interpretations of deservingness create distinct policy outcomes for various population groups. This research investigates explicitly how these notions of deserving establish a pattern of inclusion and exclusion in social assistance programs. The subsequent chapters will outline the research design and methodology, particularly addressing the adaptations made due to COVID-19 fieldwork limitations.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology for Assessing Deservingness in Social Assistance

3.1 Introduction

It was in February 2022, as I was conducting my "virtual fieldwork" from my desk in Jakarta. I received a WhatsApp message from one of the staff members of a Director in Bappenas informing me that her supervisor was willing to be interviewed as my research respondent. I knew this official personally while working at DFAT (Australian Embassy), where he was one of the key government counterparts for the program I managed. However, I did not want to approach him directly, and instead, I followed the regular protocol of sending a letter to his office to request a time for me to interview and explain the purpose of my PhD project. I followed up with his staff, requesting a meeting to interview him. Initially, I was pessimistic about whether he would be willing to be interviewed for my PhD research. I understood he was busy as a director overseeing poverty reduction and social assistance in Bappenas, especially during a Pandemic. When our Zoom call started, I realised he was not having the interview in his office. He was in the passenger seat of his car, most likely commuting from one place to another. With Jakarta's bad traffic, I would not blame him for using his time commuting in traffic to have a Zoom interview with me. Otherwise, I would have to wait a few more weeks for an in-person interview with him. This story reflects the challenges and opportunities of conducting "fieldwork" during the COVID-19 pandemic.

I began my PhD journey in February 2020, just a month before the COVID-19 crisis unfolded. This unprecedented situation presented numerous challenges in designing my research project, particularly regarding fieldwork in Indonesia. Initially focused on sub-national social assistance in Papua Province, I had to adapt my research design due to the uncertainties of whether I could travel to Indonesia. This adaptation process led to three key changes in my research focus. First, shifting my analysis to the policy formulation process and how it leads to a pattern of inclusion and exclusion in social assistance. Second, broadening my research scope to include national and sub-national social assistance initiatives. Third, I reconsidered the COVID-19 angle. Initially, I anticipated that COVID-19 would trigger a broader reform in Indonesia's social protection reform as the Indonesian government started to introduce and expand existing coverage of social assistance programs to anticipate the economic impact of COVID-19. However, it turned out that the expansion of social assistance coverage was only temporary. Hence, I explore the COVID-19 angle as one of the external factors influencing policy formulation rather than the central focus.

These changes shaped my final research questions, which aim to complement existing research in the field. The main research question for this study is “How do notions of deservingness influence the inclusion and exclusion of different groups in social assistance?” with three sub-questions on the underlying ideas, the influence of policy actors and the different dynamics at national and sub-national levels.

The COVID-19 pandemic, while posing challenges, also presented unique opportunities for my research design. I gathered diverse perspectives from national and sub-national policy actors by combining virtual and physical fieldwork approaches. This mixed approach allowed for a more comprehensive analysis of the policy formulation process, capturing formal policy discussions and informal interactions that shape decision-making.

Building on the previous chapter's discussion of deservingness in social protection policy reform, this chapter outlines the research strategy employed in this thesis. The methodology is grounded in an interpretive approach and the anthropology of policy framework, which are particularly suited to unpacking the complexities of policymaking processes in the Indonesian context. These approaches allow a nuanced exploration of how policy actors' perceptions and interactions shape social assistance policies.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, it outlines the interpretive approach and anthropology of the policy framework that I use to unpack the complexities of the policymaking process. Second, the chapter will explain how this study adopts the multi-site approach and redefines the field used in the anthropology of policy approach. Third, it will discuss my case study approach, including selecting the field location. Fourth, I discuss the strategy of my data collection before I end the chapter with ethical considerations and reflection.

3.2 Interpretative research approach and anthropology of policy

To answer my research questions, I anchored my research in the interpretive approach in public policy as my general approach to unpacking the complexities of the policymaking process. Using the interpretive approach, this thesis will examine policy paradoxes and ambiguities and examine meanings embedded in actions, language, and artifacts in policymaking (Hendriks, 2007). Unlike the positivist approach in public policy, which often aims to understand “what works” by using a causal explanation of a particular phenomenon, the interpretive approach seeks to deconstruct policy to reveal societal patterns and processes. The interpretive approach also emphasises the “decentred” or “focusing with actors” approach to unpacking individuals’ practices, beliefs and actions by closely looking at their meaning, beliefs and discourses (Boswell et al., 2019). According to Blaike and Priest (2017), social

reality is not independent of the social actors or researchers; social actors produce and reproduce as they go about their everyday lives (p.31).

In this interpretative approach, this thesis employs an abductive logic of inquiry to generate thematic descriptions and abstracted typification (Blaikie & Priest, 2017, p.26). As Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2011, p.27) explain, abductive logic of inquiry or abductive reasoning is a form of logical inference that moves from observations to the most plausible explanation. In abductive logic, the researcher continuously moves back and forth between empirical puzzles and theoretical explanations (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2011). Further, I utilised concepts not to explain a phenomenon or establish causal links but to explore the phenomenon and identify potential areas for explanations. I aimed to uncover and elaborate on these concepts by using the language of my research participants (Blaikie & Priest, 2017, p.35).

This thesis drew on the "anthropology of policy" as an essential lens for analysis. According to Tate (2020), anthropologists see policy as a "generative realm of cultural production" produced and shaped by values, norms, identities and practices. Hence, my role as a researcher was to examine policy as a social and cultural construct that needs to be analysed and contextualised to understand its meanings (Tate, 2020). Similar to interpretative policy research, the anthropology of policy works from the premise that policy is non-linear and rejects the idea of a "policy cycle" (such as agenda-setting, policy formulation, policy implementation and evaluation) as a "neat process". Shore and Wright (2011) noted that both interpretative policy research and anthropology of policy aim to deconstruct policy to reveal "patterns and processes in the organisation of power and governance in society". This involves analysing political dynamics and unpacking how power in society shapes, influences, and reflects itself in social protection policy, especially determining who receives social assistance and who is excluded.

Firstly, using an anthropological lens, I critically analysed the "political assemblage" of concepts, institutions and actors, interacting in different sites to consolidate the regime of power or knowledge or to create new rationality of governance (Shore, 2018). Further, the anthropology of policy requires the researcher to analyse the "hegemony and contestation" central to the idea of policy. In my research, I examined the political conflicts to defend or unsettle established discourse and promote particular ways of conceptualising the role of the individual, social institutions, or government (Wright & Reinhold, 2011). To answer my research questions, I unpacked concepts such as "deservingness" and "social rights" through how policy actors explain the responsibility of the State in providing social protection. Further, I examined how different actors experience, interpret and engage with the policy process in

social assistance, and how they apply different concepts within their respective contexts while considering the political and social interests that shape their actions.

Secondly, as my interest was to examine the “political process” and the “socio-cultural” aspect of society that influences social assistance, the anthropological approach to policy analysis is “fit for purpose”. I aimed to understand why there are exclusions in social assistance by understanding Indonesia’s social protection policy as a process of construction. This means taking policies at face value and determining how social assistance policy is influenced by or is a product of the values, norms, and identities shared by society.

Thirdly, the anthropology of policy allowed me to do a “studying through” approach (Reinhold & Wright, 2011). While traditional anthropology usually focuses on “studying down” or looking at those who are “governed”, such as citizens or a community, Reinhold and Wright (2011) argued that the anthropology of policy could benefit by doing “studying through” where researchers follow how an issue is framed and reframed over time.

> “…. to follow a process of contestation as it tracks back and forth across different sites in a policy field and over time, to reveal how a new governing discourse emerges and becomes institutionalised” (Reinold & Wright, 2011, pp. 87-88).

Furthermore, Laura Nader (1972) suggested that anthropologists who study policy "study up” by examining the elites and those with power to influence policy, in order to understand how power and responsibility are exercised. Therefore, in my approach to studying social assistance expansion and exclusion, I adopted both the “studying up” approach that focuses on policy actors and the policymaking process, and also the “studying through” approach in looking at how different events generate the various conceptions of deservingness in social assistance by following the other discourse of social assistance over time, in particular how it evolved since it was first introduced after the AFC and just after the COVID-19 crisis.

Further, using the anthropological lens, I see policy not as “solving problems”, which is the dominant discourse in policymaking analysis, but as “something to problematise” (Shore & Wright, 2011) and that policymaking does not diagnose but rather “produce[s] problems to be solved through policy” (Tate, 2020). Hence, according to Shore and Wright (2011), what needs to be analysed is “how ways of doing and being are framed”. In practice, Shore and Wright (2011) suggested that a researcher ask the main questions “what are the different perspectives on an issue? Whose views prevailed and how do these ways of seeing become hegemonic?” (p.13). I applied this analysis in investigating the “ideas of deservingness” in social assistance to understand the dominant narratives, how deservingness is being framed,

the different perspectives around deservingness and why it becomes hegemonic in social protection policy.

In understanding discourse in social assistance and broader social protection policy, I complemented the anthropology of policy (Reinhold & Wright, 2011). approach with the critical policy analysis and discursive institutionalism (Schmidt, 2015) approaches. Critical policy analysis is also an interpretative way of analysing policy using a post-structuralist approach. According to Howarth and Griggs (2015), discourse does not merely consist of an abstract "cognitive system of beliefs and words"; they propose a "thicker" conception that sees discourse as a "constitutive dimension of social relations". Discourse is a shared way of understanding the world, which enables those who subscribe to it to interpret and provide a "coherent story of account" (p.112). However, Howarth and Griggs (2015) also pointed out that discourse does not simply "re-present" or reflect a pre-existing or underlying reality, but it "partially brings that reality into being, so that it has a constitutive function as well" (p.112).

In conducting discourse analysis, I examined what is being said and the "practices" and the "actions" of policy actors in social assistance policy design and implementation. Drawing on Vivian Schmidt's (2015) work on discursive institutionalism, I analysed the policy discourse and looked beyond "text and talk in context" to the role of practices and political activities that take different forms based on the historical and political context. The discursive institutionalism approach explains how discourse is not a representation but an "interaction" and ideas conveyed through "discursive argumentation lead to action" (Schmidt, 2015, p.175). Further, discourse is not just a representation and an embodiment of ideas. It involves:

> "interactive processes by and through which ideas are generated in the policy sphere by discursive policy communities and entrepreneurs and communicated, deliberated and/or contested in the political sphere by political leaders, social movements and the public" (Schmidt, 2015, p.171).

3.3 "Non-Local Ethnography": Redefining the "field" in the anthropology of policy during COVID-19 times

The anthropology of policy approach necessitates a redefinition of traditional "fieldwork" concepts, which proved particularly valuable during the COVID-19 pandemic. This section outlines how I applied a multi-sited approach in my research on social assistance policy in Indonesia, adapting to the challenges posed by COVID-19, where travel restrictions initially disrupted my plan to conduct physical fieldwork.

First, I considered “the field” to be all places where social assistance policymaking and practices occurred, both physical and virtual. Recent scholarship has expanded our understanding of ethnography and “the field” in policy research, moving beyond traditional bounded settings (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Dubois, 2017). Gupta and Ferguson (1997) redefined ethnography as a “flexible and opportunistic strategy for diversifying and making more complex our understanding of various places, people and predicaments through an attentiveness to different forms of knowledge available from different social and political locations” (p.4). Dubois (2017) reconceptualised the field as encompassing policy processes across various levels and locations rather than being confined to specific organisations or groups.

Second, a multi-sited approach allows me to comprehensively analyse policy processes across various locations and government jurisdictions. Researchers like Wright (2011) and Peck and Theodore (2015) have advocated for this approach in policy studies. Peck and Theodore (2015), for example, followed “conditional cash transfer” (CCT) as a global policy model and examined how the CCT was being translated or “mutated” in different countries, including Indonesia. Following their lead, I traced different social assistance policy models across national and sub-national sites, analysing the connections between events and actors at various levels of government (Wright & Reynold, 2011).

Third, I adopted “non-local” ethnography to adapt to the constraints of the pandemic and travel restrictions (Feldman, 2011, p.46). This approach expands data collection methods beyond traditional participant observation to a “non-local” ethnography, enabling a broader understanding of policy practice. This “non-local” ethnography provided an opportunity during the COVID-19 crisis when travel restrictions occurred from Australia to Indonesia. As I started designing this research, whether I could conduct in-person fieldwork in Indonesia was uncertain. While I eventually could conduct in-person fieldwork and travel to Indonesia for in-person data collection, the “non-local” ethnography has provided me with a valuable alternative to start the fieldwork without being able to travel. This non-local ethnography allows me to examine the “discourse that enables, organises and effectively integrates so many disparate policy practices beyond the locality” (Feldman, 2011, p.33). This research focuses on social protection policy discourse, which is present in multiple locations (Feldman, 2011).

In conducting a “non-local” ethnography, I used participant observation in the “virtual world” when there were still travel restrictions and I could not travel for physical fieldwork. With travel restrictions and physical distancing requirements, national government and development organisations’ policy events, such as workshops and discussions, were conducted online

using the Zoom platform. I made use of those opportunities to start my fieldwork. This online "field observation" allowed me to observe the policy discussions and interactions of different policy actors, including state and non-state actors such as international development agencies, non-governmental organisations, and academics. I also followed the approach of Feldman (2011), who pointed out how accessing archives can also be used as "non-local" ethnography. I accessed data from various online platforms, including YouTube and online news, to analyse political speeches and access multiple government policies and laws, which I will discuss later in my data collection strategy.

While I took the "non-local" ethnography approach, as my research is multi-scalar, I also collected in-person data when travel became possible, from June to mid-August 2022. I went to three provinces in Indonesia to collect data. Figure 3.1 reflects Aceh Province, where I went to three districts: Aceh Besar, Aceh Jaya and Sabang. I also went to Badung District in Bali Province and Bintan District in *Kepulauan* Riau Province. I selected these different sites as I could find sub-national level social assistance programs targeting different population groups, which I will explain in the next section.

Figure 3.1 Map of Indonesia and field locations

In summary, I adopted a multi-scalar approach. I used a redefinition of the "field" and "non-local ethnography" in studying policy. I can observe how the Indonesian discourse of social assistance and social protection is being used and internalised by different actors in the policymaking process and embedded in the institutions and practices. In the next section, I

will analyse how policy is related to social and political interests through the case study approach.

3.4 Case study approach and field location

This study employed a case study approach to examine the concept of deservingness in Indonesia's social assistance system. Drawing on Lund's (2014) conceptualisation of cases as analytical constructs, Indonesia served as an overarching case, chosen for its unique historical, political and economic context in social assistance policy.

Within this broader case, I examined three sub-cases: social assistance policies for children, women and the elderly. Three sub-cases were not merely empirical units but analytical constructs that allowed for a nuanced exploration of how notions of deservingness are constructed and operationalised. I compared the similarities and differences between or within cases in different contexts (Baxter et al., 2008). Multiple case studies allow for comparison and contrast, offering a deeper and richer understanding of the problem than a single case (Meyer, 2001).

Following Blatter and Haverland's (2012) approach, I used the concept of deservingness to unpack and analyse the three cases, focusing on events, structures, actions and mechanisms. This approach enabled intensive reflection on the relationship between concrete empirical observations and abstract theoretical concepts.

This study used "target population groups" as the unit of analysis, following Leisering's (2018) suggestion that this approach more effectively examines entitlements than an approach that focuses on specific programs. This choice also aligns with Ingram and Schneider's (2015) work on the social construction of target groups in policy analysis. Their research on US social policy demonstrates that social constructions are embedded in policies, frames, discourse and narratives and must remain consistent or be forced to change over time (Ingram & Schneider, 2015).

Drawing on Lund's (2014) emphasis on abstraction, I moved iteratively between theoretical concepts of deservingness and social protection and empirical observations in each sub-case. This process enabled theory refinement and development. The comparative aspect of examining three distinct groups (children, women and the elderly) within the Indonesian context allowed for identifying patterns and variations in how deservingness is constructed across different policy domains and government jurisdictions at national and sub-national levels.

This approach is similar to Peck and Theodore's (2015) work on "Fast Policy", where they compared the global "policy mutations" of CCT. Like their study, which used policy domains as the unit of analysis, this research examined how constructions of target population groups change over time and across different contexts, employing a "studying through" approach. This method allowed for a dynamic understanding of how notions of deservingness evolve and are operationalised in other settings within Indonesia's social assistance landscape. Based on these considerations, I established this methodological framework and applied specific criteria to select the sub-cases for in-depth analysis.

The three sub-cases, children, women and the elderly, were selected based on two main criteria. First, they represent different levels of perceived deservingness in Indonesia's social assistance system. Children are considered "most deserving" as existing programs primarily target poor families with children. Women are considered "partially deserving" as their entitlement is often linked to their reproductive role as mothers. The elderly are deemed "less deserving", evidenced by their limited coverage in Indonesia's national social protection system. This classification aligns with Ingram and Schneider's (2015) approach to categorising target population groups: the advantaged, contenders, dependents and deviants in categorising target population groups, though adapted to the Indonesian context.

Second, these groups are classified as "vulnerable" within the life-cycle approach to social protection, as outlined in the ILO's Social Protection Floors model (ILO, 2012). This model encompasses various life stages and circumstances, including maternity care, childhood, and working age (particularly for those unable to earn sufficient income and old age) (ILO, 2012). Focusing on children, women and the elderly, this study examines how notions of deservingness are constructed across different life stages and gender roles in Indonesia's social assistance framework. By examining these various cases, I aimed to make analytical generalisations about how Indonesia's social assistance is socially and culturally constructed, focusing on the "resonance" of elements, dynamics, and relations across cases (Lund, 2014). This approach allowed for generalisations around existing or new concepts and theories to understand how policymaking processes and practices in social assistance explain exclusions and ideas around deservingness.

To provide a comprehensive understanding of how deservingness is constructed across these different groups, I examine each case in detail below:

Case 1: Children

In the children's case in Chapter Four, I compared two global policy models targeting children: the conditional cash transfer (CCT), which uses a residual approach promoted by the World Bank, and the child grant or child allowance, based on a rights-based and child rights approach promoted by UNICEF. This comparison revealed how the national government adopted CCT while select sub-national governments implemented child grants, highlighting different constructs of deservingness for children at various governance levels. This case study will be further explored in Chapter Four of this thesis.

Case 2: Women

In the women's case study (Chapter Five), I focused on national government programs and analysed other social policies outside social assistance, such as microfinance programs. This approach allowed me to compare how the national government constructed underlying ideas of women's deservingness in their reproductive role as mothers and in their productive role working in the informal sector. The women's case study reveals how women are considered more deserving in their reproductive than productive roles. This case study will be discussed in Chapter Five, including the various factors that form this particular construct of deserving or less deserving women.

Case 3: The Elderly

The elderly in Indonesia present an intriguing case for studying deservingness in social assistance. Despite a significant proportion of the elderly population being economically vulnerable, with 36% classified as poor and vulnerable (World Bank, 2020b), only 2% receive social assistance (SMERU & TNP2K, 2020), while the ILO found only 13% of elderly are covered by social protection (ILO, 2024). This coverage is notably lower than in neighbouring Southeast Asia countries. Moreover, programs like PKH that include elderly benefits distribute assistance to families rather than directly to the elderly, reflecting assumptions about family structures that may not match reality. At the sub-national level, a few government districts have introduced elderly grants. In this research, I have chosen three districts that have introduced elderly grants and examined how deservingness is constructed at the sub-national level. By comparing national and sub-national social assistance for the elderly in Chapter Six, I want to unpack the different dynamics that influence the notions of deservingness.

In the next subsection, I describe the field location where I conducted a sub-national level data collection from the field. My main focus in selecting these different sites where I could find sub-national level social assistance programs targeting different population groups. I chose two provinces with Special Autonomy (Otonomi Khusus or Otsus) in my Province and District selection: Aceh Province and Papua Province. Regions with Special Autonomy Status, such as Papua and Aceh Provinces, receive higher-level funding per capita and have more authority over decision making across major development sectors (Huda et al., 2020). While the provincial government manage the *Otsus* funds from the central government, allocations are also given to the district government to manage the *Otsus Fund*.

3.4.1 Description of field location

Aceh Province (Aceh Jaya, Aceh Besar, Sabang)

I visited three districts in Aceh Province with district-level social assistance programs: a child-grant in Sabang, an elderly grant in Aceh Jaya and a cash grant for poor families in Aceh Besar (Pro ABES). Aceh has a distinct socio-religious background, with Syariah (Muslim law) applied throughout the province. While Aceh Province does not have its provincial-level social assistance programs, the selected districts use their *Otsus* fund allocation for social assistance, including the districts in my study: Aceh Jaya District and the City of Sabang.

Bintan District (Kepulauan Riau Province) and Badung District (Bali Province)

I also visited Bintan District in Kepulauan Riau Province and Badung District in Bali Province, both of which have their own elderly social assistance programs. When I visited Badung, the elderly grant was temporarily suspended due to the COVID-19 response, though the program had started in 2018. In Bintan, which launched its social assistance program for the elderly in 2021 during COVID-19, the program was active when I conducted my research.

Papua Province (Virtual)

I originally intended to conduct fieldwork in Papua Province to study their child grant pilot program. However, due to the uncertainties and difficulty of travelling to Papua, a remote province in eastern Indonesia, during the Pandemic, it was not feasible to conduct extensive fieldwork there[9]. However, to provide sub-national comparison with the national approach, I

[9] Papua province also has limited infrastructure compared to the other provinces in Indonesia. In terms of security, the Australian government travel advice also considered the Papua Province as a "reconsider your need to travel" because of the high security risk in the area (Department Foreign Affairs and Trade, n.d.)

managed to include a component on Papua Province, especially in Chapter Four, where the province introduced a child grant pilot in 2018. Through my existing relationships with the provincial and district government officials, I conducted online interviews and in-person interviews (when officials were travelling to Jakarta) with five officials at the provincial and district levels.

In summary, I have explained why the case study approach is used in this research with Indonesia as the overarching case and with three sub-cases: children, women and the elderly. This section justifies the use of the target population group as the unit of analysis. It discusses why and how children, women and the elderly are selected to explore the notions of deservingness. This comparative analysis across different population groups and governance levels provided rich insights into the complex and often contradictory ways deservingness is constructed in Indonesia's social assistance policies, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of policy exclusions and inclusions. I have also discussed the field location where I conducted in-person fieldwork and the area where virtual fieldwork was conducted. In the next section, I will discuss my strategies for collecting data for this research.

3.5 Strategies of data collection

This study employed a multi-method approach to data collection and analysis, combining virtual and in-person techniques to capture the complexity of social assistance policy in Indonesia. In this section, I will discuss the various data collection methods that I used in this research:

3.5.1 In-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs)

In-depth interviews were my primary method, with the main objective being to gain insights into how policy actors frame the narrative around social assistance policy that reflects the underpinning ideas and deservingness in social assistance. Further, the in-depth interview gave me an understanding of how actors define and frame problems, their motivations and beliefs, and political and social interests, all of which informed their policymaking.

During my 10 months of "fieldwork", both virtual and in-person, between November 2021 and August 2022, I interviewed 62 respondents who were mainly social assistance policy actors. I included state actors at the national and sub-national levels responsible for formulating and implementing policies. I also included non-state actors, whom I considered "policy entrepreneurs" in Indonesia's social protection policy. Moreover, I included program implementers such as PKH facilitators and non-public servant technical team members who

support the Ministry of Social Affairs in implementing PKH to understand more about the complexities of the implementation and how policy discourse is being translated “in practice”.

In “Entering the Field,” I adopted Mosse's (2006) approach of conducting ethnography among policy actors I had previously worked with. Mosse’s approach demonstrates how a researcher’s previous professional role can provide unique insights into policy processes and institutional cultures. As a former Senior Program Manager for the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, I leveraged my professional relationships to initiate interviews. This approach proved particularly valuable during the COVID-19 crisis, as the established trust and rapport facilitated more open and comfortable conversations over Zoom.

I began fieldwork in November 2021, relying significantly on online interviews, especially for national-level participants. COVID-19 restrictions were easing at this time, but many in Indonesia still preferred virtual meetings. I allowed participants to choose between online and in-person interviews based on their comfort level. I followed Howlett’s (2021) approach to online interviews, conducting them as informal “chats with friends.” As Howlett notes, this method grants interviewees greater agency and power as they participate from the comfort of their own spaces. It also enabled me to be embedded in the respondents’ world, fostering a more reflexive awareness of how participants perceived me as a researcher. For participants I did not know previously, particularly at sub-national levels, I employed a “snowballing” approach and began by sharing my research motivations and professional background to establish trust. Throughout the process, I aimed to develop symmetrical “working relationships” with participants, recognising them as experts rather than mere sources of information.

Before the interview, I provided a Participant Information Sheet and a list of indicative questions so they could be prepared and know what to expect in the interview. All participants provided oral consent and were informed about the recording of interviews for transcription purposes. I used open-ended questions guided by a prepared list to ensure coverage of key research topics. Direct questions about deservingness were avoided; I asked them to reflect on the current social protection programs and their views on why the government prioritises certain population groups over others. Through interviewing policy actors, I got insights into how they rationalise whether different target population groups are entitled or not entitled to social assistance.

With the sub-national policy actors, most of them would reflect on the challenges of implementing the national government's social assistance programs. Though policy

implementation was not the focus of my analysis, as I focused on policy formulation and policy design, the rich data on social assistance policy implementation in Indonesia provided a critical overview and broader context on how policy discourse does not only happen in "text" or documents, but how it shapes policy practices.

Table 3.1: Key Informants for Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

No	Code	Agency	Gender	Interview Format	Date of Interview
1	NG1	TNP2K (Echelon 3 equivalent)	Female	Online (Zoom)	20/11/2021
				Online (Zoom)	28/04/2022
2	NG2	Bappenas (Echelon 3)	Male	Online (Zoom)	9/11/2021
3	NG3	Bappenas (Echelon 1)	Female	Online (Zoom)	19/11/2021
				In-Person	16/06/2022
4	NG4	TNP2K (Advisor)	Male	Online (Zoom)	23/11/2021
5	NG5	Former Kemenko PMK+Bappenas (Former Echelon 1)	Male	Online (Zoom)	29/11/2021
6	RAT1	SMERU (Senior Advisor)	Male	Online (Zoom)	7/12/2021
7	RAT2	Ex-World Bank	Female	Online (Zoom)	8/12/2021
8	LG1	Papua Province Planning Agency (Echelon 3)	Male	In-Person	14/12/2021
9	LG2	Asmat District Finance (Echelon 1)	Male	Online (Zoom)	13/12/2021
10	LG3	Papua Province (Echelon 1)	Male	In-Person	14/12/2021
11	NG6	TNP2K (Echelon 2)	Male	Online (Zoom)	21/12/2021
12	NG7	Kemenko PMK (Echelon 2)	Male	Online (Zoom)	22/12/2021
13	NG8	VP Office (Former Echelon 1)	Male	In-Person	5/04/2022
14	NG9	Bappenas (Echelon 1)	Male	Online (Zoom)	19/01/2022
15	NG10	Ministry of Social Affairs (Echelon 2)	Male	Online (Zoom)	27/01/2022
16	LG4	Paniai District Planning Agency (Echelon 3)	Male	Online (Zoom)	28/01/2022
17	RAT3	Academics (UI-Lembaga Demography)	Female	Online (Zoom)	7/02/2022
18	NG11	Bappenas (Echelon 2)	Male	Online (Zoom)	8/02/2022
19	RAT4	BRIN	Male	Online (Zoom)	15/02/2022
20	RAT5	PRAKARSA	Female	Online (Zoom)	17/02/2022
21	NG12	Ministry of Finance (Echelon 2)	Male	Online (Zoom)	25/02/2022
22	RAT6	INFID	Male	Online (Zoom)	28/02/2022
23	RAT7	Academic (FEB - UI)	Male	Online (Zoom)	5/04/2022
24	RAT8	Academic (Puskapa UI)	Female	Online (Zoom)	11/04/2022
25	LG4	Papua Province (Echelon 4)	Female	Online (Zoom)	13/05/2022
26	NG13	Bappenas (Echelon 2)	Female	In-Person	8/06/2022
27	PI1	Former PKH Technical Team MOSA	Female	In-Person	8/06/2022
28	NGO1	PEKKA (Executive level)	Female	Online (Zoom)	9/06/2022

29	NGO2	KAPAL Perempuan (Executive Level)	Female	Online (Zoom)	13/06/2022
30	LG5	Bappeda Badung (Secretary)	Male	In-Person	24/06/2022
31	LG6	Social Affairs Badung (Echelon 3)	Female	In-Person	21/06/2022
32	PI2	PKH Facilitators Badung FGD	Female	In-Person	21/06/2022
33	PR1	PKH Badung Beneficiary	Female	In-Person	21/06/2022
34	LG7	District Secretary of Badung	Male	In-Person	21/06/2022
35	LG8	Bappeda Bintan (Head)	Female	In-Person	29/06/2022
36	LG9	Dinsos Bintan (Echelon 3)	Female	In-Person	29/06/2022
37	LG10	Dinsos Bintan (Echelon 3)	Female	In-Person	29/06/2022
38	LG11	Bappeda Bintan (Head)	Male	In-Person	29/06/2022
39	FGD1	PKH Bintan FGD	Male	In-Person	29/06/2022
40	LG12	Dinsos Bintan (Staff)	Female	In-Person	29/06/2022
41	NG14	TNP2K (Working Level)	Female	In-Person	19/07/2022
42	RAT9	SMERU (Senior Level)	Male	Online (Zoom)	20/07/2022
43	IA1	World Bank (Specialist)	Male	Online (Zoom)	1/09/2022
44	IA2	UNICEF (Specialist)	Female	In-Person	27/07/2022
45	PI3	PKH Aceh Besar Program Implementer	Male	In-Person	27/07/2022
46	LG13	Dinsos Aceh Besar (Head)	Male	In-Person	27/07/2022
47	LG14	Dinsos Aceh Besar (Staff)	Female	In-Person	27/07/2022
48	FGD2	PEKKA Aceh Besar FGD	Female	In-Person	28/07/2022
49	PI4	Ex Coordinator Pro-Abes Aceh Besar	Male	In-Person	28/07/2022
50	LG15	Head of Village Aceh Besar	Male	In-Person	27/07/2022
51	LG16	DPRD / Ex Bupati Aceh Jaya	Male	In-Person	27/07/2022
52	LG17	Bappeda Aceh Jaya (Head)	Male	In-Person	2/08/2022
53	LG18	Dinsos Aceh Jaya (Secretary)	Male	In-Person	3/08/2022
54	PI5	PKH Coordinator Aceh Jaya	Male	In-Person	4/08/2022
55	LG19	Dinsos Aceh Jaya (Echelon 3)	Male	In-Person	4/08/2022
55	RAT10	Academic UNSYAH (Economics)	Female	In-Person	1/08/2022
56	RAT11	Academic UNSYAH (Economics)	Male	In-Person	26/07/2022
57	IA3	UNICEF (Senior Head Aceh)	Male	In-Person	5/08/2022
58	PI6	GEUNASEH Program Implementer	Male	In-Person	5/08/2022
59	LG20	Mayor's Special Staff/Ex-Head of Bappeda Sabang	Male	In-Person	9/08/2022
60	LG21	Bappeda Sabang (Secretary)	Male	In-Person	8/08/2022
61	LG22	Bappeda Province (Echelon 4)	Female	In-Person	10/09/2022
62	IA4	Development Pathway	Male	In-Person	4/11/2022

To complement individual interviews, I conducted several Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) throughout my research when I found it more suitable to have a group discussion. These FGDs were valuable when meeting groups of participants, such as PKH (Program Keluarga Harapan) facilitators at district social affairs offices or PKH recipients gathered by these

facilitators. The group setting often provided a more comfortable environment for participants, especially women recipients, to share their experiences and perspectives. I also conducted an FGD with the Aceh Besar branch of PEKKA,[10] a women's grassroots NGO working with women heads of households, to gain perspectives from both recipients and non-recipients of social assistance programs, both national and district-level assistance. The purpose was to gather collective experiences with social assistance programs and explore community perceptions of deservingness. While the primary analysis of this study does not focus on community perspectives of deservingness, these FGDs provided valuable contextual information. They helped triangulate data from individual interviews and policy documents. They offered a nuanced view of deservingness, understood and experienced at the grassroots level.

3.5.2 Documents and media analysis

In addition to collecting primary data from interviews, I gathered secondary data from government documents, reports from non-state actors, and various online media sources. As the main objective of this research is to analyse social assistance policy discourse, I examined government regulations and strategic documents to provide background information and unpack the underlying ideas and dominant narrative. I focused on analysing government regulations, such as laws relevant to social protection, as well as government strategic documents, including the government's five-year medium-term development plan or the *Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Nasional (*RPJMN). The RPJMN outlined the national government's approach to social protection and its broader poverty reduction strategy. I also examined specific Laws and Regulations regarding children and the elderly, which I will highlight in the empirical chapters.

I analysed reports and documents from non-state actors, often called the "grey literature", produced by international agencies and national think tanks. For example, the World Bank (2020) and OECD (2019) produced reports to analyse Indonesia's social protection system. I used secondary data to analyse the dominant discourse on social protection and triangulate information from respondents. For example, my initial analysis of the gaps in Indonesia's social protection policy was based on reports from the World Bank, OECD, and TNP2K. I examined how the different agencies problematise population groups and social assistance. For example, UNICEF published a report on child poverty in Indonesia (UNICEF Indonesia, 2017)

[10] PEKKA (Perempuan Kepala Keluarga or Women Headed Households) is a grassroots national women's NGO, with the main constituency being women heads of households. In 2022, they operated in 27 Provinces and had around 25,000 members.

and introduced the concept of a child grant for the first time. SMERU and PRAKARSA also produced research reports on the elderly and social protection.

Another secondary resource that I analysed is online news. I utilised online media, including YouTube and online news, to capture statements by politicians, such as the Indonesian President and Indonesian parliament members, and how they frame and create narratives around social protection and various population groups in Indonesia. This includes national news outlets such as Kompas.com and local online media in Aceh such as the Tribun News. I analysed political statements in news media to analyse notions of deservingness towards population groups, similar to the way historians use archives to analyse discourse.

3.5.3 Direct participant observation

As mentioned in the ethnography section, I conducted both virtual and in-person fieldwork, as well as direct participant observation. While my research did not focus on a particular community, nor did I perform a traditional extended ethnography, I attempted to apply the "participant observation" technique when conducting research at various sites, including online events and in-person fieldwork. For example, when I was in Sabang, Aceh Province, I observed the activities of POSYANDU (*Pos Pelayanan Terpadu* – Integrated Services for Early Age Health) as part of the child grant program. When I interviewed various government officials at the sub-national level, I also observed the office buildings and their day-to-day activities and interactions with the state officials. For example, the district planning agency, Bappeda, can be considered a more strategic agency, often physically located closer to the Bupati or Head of District office.
In contrast, Social Affairs can be considered a less-resourced agency. To capture data from my participant observation, I developed field notes and reflections, particularly after completing the fieldwork. The data collected through direct participant observation provided me with different nuances, particularly the varied dynamics at the sub-national level.

Though I consider this research a non-local ethnography and participant observation only provides complementary data, this method gave me a more nuanced understanding of the dominant discourse in social assistance policy. I was able to examine how discourse influences policy apparatus in day-to-day practice, not only from the policymakers but also how discourse affects policy implementers or the "street-level bureaucrats". Furthermore, the direct participation observations also revealed policy implications, particularly how inclusion or exclusion in social assistance affected population groups, such as children, women, and the elderly.

3.5.4 Data analysis and interpretation

This research, grounded in interpretive and anthropological approaches, focused on interactions between actors, institutions and ideas. Following Geertz's (1973) concept of “thick description”, I aimed to capture and render the complex conceptual structures encountered in the field, a characteristic that Schwartz-Shea (2014) notes as crucial for interpretative research. A few steps were involved in analysing interpretative research.

I employed a data analysis “at the moment” while still in the field, as Boswell et al. (2019) suggested through self-reflection notes after I finished interviewing to get early insights from my data collection. Then, once I returned from fieldwork or after conducting a few interviews, I transcribed the interviews in Bahasa Indonesia and translated them into English, ensuring a deep engagement with the data from the outset. Finally, when transcribing the interviews, I used NVivo software to organise the data into key themes, such as social justice, rights, residual approach, political dynamics, or bureaucratic constraints. This process helped tease out how abstract concepts from the literature were interpreted in everyday discourse and practices of social assistance policy actors. I also constantly moved “back and forth” between empirical data and existing literature, developing “mini theories” (Hendriks, 2007).

3.6 Ethical considerations, positionality and reflexivity

Throughout this research, as interpretative research demands reflexivity or researchers’ critical self-reflection, I maintained a critical awareness of my positionality as a Western-educated female Indonesian researcher. My background in working for the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), where I managed aid programs in social protection in Indonesia, provided both opportunities and challenges in conducting this research. My existing role in social protection policy provided me with valuable insights, background knowledge, and connections that were instrumental in conducting this research. However, shifting from my development practitioner hat to an academic researcher role was also challenging. My unique position required constant reflexivity to navigate the complex power dynamics inherent in the research process.

I acknowledge that my prior experience and knowledge in the field of social protection in Indonesia shaped my approach to this research. Working in the social protection sector provided me with insights into the complexities of Indonesia’s social protection policy space, particularly in terms of the diverse dynamics among government actors. However, I remained aware of these potential biases and strived to maintain an open and critical perspective. To mitigate potential biases and ensure ethical research practices, I maintained a reflective

journal throughout the research process, using it to examine my assumptions and interpretations critically. I also regularly had discussions with my supervisors to challenge my perspective and consider alternative viewpoints. I also remained transparent about my background and research objective with all participants. I gradually shifted my identity and perspective from that of a DFAT employee to an independent academic researcher.

Throughout my fieldwork, I frequently encountered ethical dilemmas as a researcher with technical knowledge of social protection policy and networks, and connections to national and international stakeholders. For example, I often heard district-level social affairs officials who had to implement national social assistance programs make complaints about how problematic the central government's poverty database, DTKS data, was. According to them, the central government made regular changes to the beneficiaries' database of social assistance programs without providing a clear explanation for why some beneficiaries are eligible to receive assistance for one month but are no longer eligible the next month. Another situation arose when I was asked for advice by a local government regarding an international agency that had promised to support a local initiative but failed to deliver the expected support to the local government. I also encountered an ethical dilemma when the district social affairs office informed me about the "local innovation" program logo, which was painted in front of the houses of PKH recipients. From the literature, I know that this practice of "labelling" recipients can create a negative stigma and force recipients to opt out of the program, not because they are economically secure, but because they decide to "graduate" from the program due to embarrassment. I limited myself from giving these policy actors too much technical advice.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the research design and methodology used to investigate the construction of deservingness in Indonesia's social assistance policy. The study employed an interpretive approach and an anthropology of policy framework, utilising a multi-sited approach to data collection and analysis. The research design incorporated case studies of three target population groups – children, women and the elderly – to examine how notions of deservingness are constructed and operationalised across different policy domains and levels of governance. Through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, document analysis and participant observation, both virtual and in-person, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between policy discourse, actors and practices in shaping social assistance policies in Indonesia.

Chapter Four: Constructing Child Deservingness: Policy Models and Social Assistance in Decentralised Indonesia

4.1 Background

> *"Why does the newly married couple, who only have one child, receive PKH, but those with three children do not receive PKH? We do not know where we can ask. How come? We think that's just their luck/blessing." (FGD with PEKKA Aceh Besar member)*

This reflection is from a focus group discussion in Aceh Besar and captures a fundamental tension in how deservingness is constructed in Indonesia's social assistance programs. When discussing Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH), Indonesia's flagship conditional cash transfer program for poor families with children, women participants struggled to reconcile the official determination of deservingness with their own understanding of need. Their puzzlement – why some families with children receive assistance while others in similar or more pressing circumstances do not – raises critical questions about how notions of deservingness shape social assistance policy: What factors influence how social assistance programs define deserving children? Why do these constructions often conflict with community perceptions of need? This chapter examines these questions by analysing how different notions of "deserving children" have emerged and evolved in Indonesia's social assistance programs.

The Global South has seen a growing emphasis on children as key beneficiaries of social assistance programs following what has been termed the "entitlement revolution". This shift has been influenced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which establishes children as rights-holders with specific entitlements that governments are required to fulfil (Pemberton et al., 2012). Beyond rights, children are often viewed as "deserving poor" because they lack agency over their life circumstances and cannot be held responsible for their economic situation (Hölscher et al., 2014). This rights-based framework, combined with the characterisation of children as inherently deserving has contributed to more substantial political commitment towards child welfare, increasing the emphasis on children and women in social protection policies (Leisering, 2018; Sabates-Wheeler & Roelen, 2011) However, the targeting of children in social assistance programs often proves more rhetorical than substantive, with eligibility frequently restricted to specific categories such as orphan or children within particular age groups (Leisering, 2018). While numerous studies have evaluated the impact of social assistance programs on children's well-being (Bastagli et al., 2020; Cahyadi et al., 2020), a gap remains in understanding the processes and rationales behind the construction of children as "deserving" recipients of social assistance.

This trend is evident in Indonesia, with 25.6% of children benefitting from family-focused social assistance programs (ILO, 2024). The World Bank (2020) has also reported that poor families with children are essentially "most covered" to receive Indonesian social assistance programs compared to other vulnerable population groups, such as the elderly or people with disability. While Indonesia has been a signatory to the UNCRC since 1990 and introduced Law No. 35 on Child Protection in 2014, the expansion of social assistance programs targeting children has been primarily driven by the national government's policies, such as the adoption of conditional cash transfer (CCT) programs. However, selected sub-national governments have adopted a “child grant” policy model, diverging from the national government's approach. Yet, the underlying reasons for this focus on children and their implications for inclusion and exclusion remain unexplored.

This chapter addresses the research gap by posing the following question: Why are children constructed as "deserving" in social assistance programs? Second, how does social assistance policy targeting children emerge and create a pattern of inclusion and exclusion in the decentralised context of Indonesia? Third, what factors lead to notions of deservingness towards children? In answering these questions, this chapter examines how different levels of government respond to two global policy models targeting children: CCT and child grants.[11] These models, promoted by international organisations, reveal how varying constructions of deservingness influence social assistance policy at different governance levels.

This chapter aims to explore the prevalent notion of "deserving children" as children from poor families gained institutional traction in Indonesia through the convergence of religious and cultural values with technocratic social investment approaches. The success of the CCT over child grants in Indonesian social assistance policy formulation demonstrates how this convergence shaped social assistance policy, while varying local political dynamics produced different interpretations of deservingness across governance levels. This chapter is structured as follows: First, it examines the notions of deserving children during the New Order era (1966–1998), focusing on the notions of deserving orphans before the introduction of formal social assistance programs. Second, it examines how the adoption of two global policy models, conditional cash transfer and child grants, by national and sub-national governments led to the emergence of "children of poor families" as a new category of deserving recipients.

[11] In this thesis, I use the term 'child grant' to refer to unconditional cash transfers for children. This type of social assistance, promoted by UNICEF, can be implemented either through universal coverage or targeted approaches. In the literature, these programs are also known as universal child benefits, child allowances, or family allowances. The key distinguishing feature of child grants is that they provide cash transfers without imposing conditions on recipient families, unlike conditional cash transfer programs.

Third, it examines how this narrow definition of deserving children has created unintended consequences, notably by excluding other vulnerable children. Finally, it analyses how the interplay of a dominant policy coalition, the hegemony of social investment and existing sociocultural values shaped contemporary ideas about deserving children in Indonesia's social assistance programs.

4.2 Orphans and abandoned children: how children were constructed as deserving during the New Order period

Indonesia's notion of deserving children as orphans emerged during the New Order Period (1966-1998).[12] As Leisering (2018) emphasises, ideas of deservingness are "socially constructed by societal actors and subject to contestation and change", necessitating an examination of the notion of "deserving children" from a historical perspective.

The state's responsibility for orphans and abandoned children was formally established at Indonesia's independence in 1945 through Article 34(1) of the Constitution, which explicitly mandated care for "*fakir miskin* and *anak terlantar* (abandoned children)". However, this constitutional commitment did not immediately translate into state support. During its early years, the Indonesian government prioritised other issues over social welfare concerns (Sumarto, 2021). While Indonesia adopted ILO categories of social services in the 1980s, including provisions for orphans, disabled persons, the elderly, and widows (Von Benda-Beckmann, 2015), social policy remained marginal during the New Order period, as the state primarily focused on economic growth. This limited state engagement created space for communities and civil society to lead in providing social welfare.

Given the state's limitations in supporting orphans and abandoned children, the community and civil society organisations emerged as key providers of social welfare, primarily through orphanages or *Panti Asuhan* (referred to as *panti).* This institutional approach had historical roots in the colonial period, when Dutch charity organisations first introduced orphanages. Indonesian religious-based charities later expanded this model to support orphaned children (Babington, 2015; Ingleson, 2015). The involvement of civil society, predominantly the middle class, in creating orphanages for children orphaned by war helps explain why "abandoned" became a specific focus in the Indonesian constitution.[13]

[12] Indonesia gained independence in 1945. Sukarno's post-independent period is from 1945 to 1966 and Suharto's New Order period is from 1966 to 1998. See Sumarto (2017) for development of Indonesia's welfare regime since Independent to Post-New Order.

[13] My own grandmother who grew up during the war was raised in different orphanages or boarding houses because she lost both of her parents during the war period.

The development of *panti* was significantly shaped by Islamic principles and practices. As the majority religion[14] in Indonesia, Islamic values are critical in influencing ideas of deservingness, particularly through *Zakat* (almsgiving), which requires Muslims who are better off to assist the poorest (fakir miskin), including orphaned children. This religious obligation to care for orphans parallels how Christianity influenced poverty and child welfare approaches in other contexts, such as the British Poor Law of 1834 (Hulme et al., 2010, p. 15). Before Indonesia established a formal social protection system, *Zakat* functioned as an informal social protection system, redistributing wealth from the rich to the poor (Kwon & Kim, 2015; J. McCarthy et al., 2023).

The religious practice of supporting orphans became institutionalised through *panti,* with religious organisations, including *Muhammadiyah* and *Nadhlatul Ulama*[15], managing these orphanages through *Zakat* funds. These "Islamic philanthropic activities" (McLaren & Qonita, 2019, p. 11) reflect how deeply religious beliefs about orphans' deservingness shape institutional care in Indonesia. Babington (2015) shows that supporting these orphanages became a primary way for Indonesian Muslims to fulfil their religious charitable obligations, leading to the widespread establishment of *panti* across the country.

These religious traditions became increasingly integrated into state welfare institutions during the New Order period (1966-1998). While most panti remained privately funded through religious charity, the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) began establishing state-funded orphanages and provided subsidies for private institutions (Babington, 2015). This active role of the Ministry marked a significant shift in how religious traditions of caring for orphans became integrated into state welfare institutions.

Beyond these religious and institutional developments, economic hardship caused by the Asian Financial Crisis (AFC) in 1998 and the 2004 natural disaster influenced the *panti* system in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The AFC intensified poverty across the country, resulting in a significant expansion of institutional care (Babington, 2015). This growth was further accelerated by the government's fuel subsidy reduction policy introduced after the AFC, which compensated *panti* and contributed to a 31% increase in their numbers between 2001 and 2009 (Babington, 2015).

[14] Indonesia recognises six official religions: Islam, Protestant, Catholics, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism.

[15] Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah are two largest Islamic organisations in Indonesia consisting of total 50 million and 35 million members respectively (Babington 2015). These organisations own and operates orphanages as well as Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) and various other education and healthcare institutions.

Furthermore, natural disasters, particularly the 2004 earthquake and tsunami disaster in Aceh, marked another critical turning point in *panti* development. The Indonesian government and international aid communities responded by building new orphanages and placing children in institutions, rather than strengthening family and community-based support systems (Beazley, 2015). However, this institutional response proved problematic as studies revealed that many children in *panti* had living parents – 47% had both parents who were unable to provide care and support due to economic hardship rather than abandonment or death. The post-tsunami investigations, particularly Save the Children's 2006 study, documented serious violations of children's rights in Aceh's *panti,* including widespread physical and emotional abuse (Beazley, 2015). The findings provided international agencies with concrete evidence to advance their advocacy for children's rights and institutional reform (Babington, 2015; McLaren & Qonita, 2019).

These alarming research findings provided compelling evidence for international organisations, particularly Save the Children and UNICEF, to promote a “deinstitutionalisation" agenda in Indonesia. This aligned with a broader global shift among NGOs and philanthropic organisations working on children’s issues, moving from a “child saving” approach based on moral duties to a rights-based perspective grounded in the UNCRC (Wells, 2011) The UNCRC, which Indonesia ratified in 1990, emphasises the child’s best interests and recognises that institutionalisation often leads to neglect, abuse and exploitation (UNICEF, 2024a). While Indonesia had been an early adopter of the UNCRC, significant momentum for institutional reform only emerged after these post-tsunami studies revealed systemic problems in orphanages and Islamic boarding houses.

While international organisations advocated for deinstitutionalisation based on children’s rights principles, the Indonesian government’s adoption of this agenda was driven primarily by fiscal considerations. UNICEF and Save the Children led the advocacy for deinstitutionalisation as part of their broader mandate in promoting the children's rights agenda, engaging with the Ministry of Social Affairs, which oversees orphanages and social welfare in Indonesia (Babington, 2015; McLaren & Qonita, 2019). However, when the Ministry adopted this agenda in 2008, Babington (2015) revealed that the government's primary motivation was fiscal concerns about supporting *panti* rather than advancing children's rights. My analysis shows how this fiscally driven approach to child welfare significantly influenced the government's later design of social assistance programs for children, prioritising cost considerations over rights-based approaches, as discussed in the next section.

In summary, this section has examined how the concept of deserving children as orphans emerged through historical, religious, and economic factors prior to Indonesia's formal social protection system. Islamic principles of *Zakat* and charitable obligations institutionalised support for orphans through *panti,* with Muslim organisations like Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama playing key roles. During the New Order period, *panti* became the primary mechanism for providing social welfare, expanding further after the 1998 AFC and 2004 Aceh Tsunami disaster. However, studies revealed that many children in *panti* still had living parents who were driven by economic hardship to seek institutional care. Research by international organisations post-disaster revealed serious concerns about children's rights, leading to advocacy for deinstitutionalisation. The deinstitutionalisation policy agenda intersects with the emergence of the poverty reduction agenda in Indonesia, indirectly influencing the shifting notions of children deserving state assistance from orphans and abandoned children to "children of poor families". The following section will discuss how a new notion of deserving children emerged after the introduction of social assistance programs at both national and sub-national levels.

4.3 Children of poor families as deserving: competing models and their adoption across governance levels

While *panti* shaped the early understanding of deserving children in Indonesia's social welfare system during the *New Order* period, the fall of Suharto's authoritarian regime in 1998 and the subsequent *Reformasi* and democratisation process created new political space for reimagining social welfare approaches. The emergence of household social assistance programs in the mid-2000s marked a significant shift in how the state constructed children as deserving. In this new democratic context, we need to understand how different notions of deserving children emerged through the adoption of two competing global policy models at various governance levels: the World Bank's conditional cash transfer (CCT) and UNICEF's child grants. The *Post-Reformasi* period's decentralised governance structure and electoral competition incentivised national and sub-national governments to experiment with these international approaches.

Drawing on Peck and Theodore's (2015) policy mobility and mutation concept, this analysis explores how these models have "diverse manifestations" and departed from their original intentions. The global policy model promoted by international agencies is what Von Gliszczynski and Leisering (2016) described as "repertoire of models" (p.325), from which countries in the Global South adapt to their local contexts rather than fully adopt them. In Indonesia, the national government institutionalised CCT as its primary approach, while regional governments in Papua Province and Sabang City opted for child grants. To

understand how these choices produced new notions of "children of poor families" as deserving recipients, I will first examine the underlying principles of both policy models.

4.3.1 Global policy models: competing notions of deserving children

As part of the "repertoire of models" (Von Gliszczynski and Leisering, 2016), the World Bank and UNICEF have advanced contrasting approaches to child-focused social assistance. These models reflect different institutional mandates, ideologies, and fundamentally different understandings of the fact that children deserve social assistance programs.

The World Bank promotes CCT based on an economic investment view of child deservingness. Their approach views children primarily as future economic agents whose development must be secured through strategic investment (Von Gliszczynski & Leisering, 2016). Conditionality is central to this approach, as it aims to enforce behaviours the Bank considers crucial for developing productive future citizens, such as attending health check-ups and school. Another critical feature of CCT is its residual approach that uses poverty-targeting in selecting the "deserving poor households", often in developing countries, using proxy means testing (PMT). Both the conditionality and poverty targeting features of CCT are what give cash transfers their "political legitimacy and public support to cash transfer" (Bastagli et al., 2020).

This construction of deservingness reflects the World Bank's broader development paradigm: children are deserving not simply because they are more vulnerable to poverty, but because they represent future human capital that can be developed. Children play a crucial role in breaking intergenerational poverty cycles. As reflected in the World Bank's flagship report on Indonesia's social protection system:

> The social protection system in Indonesia will need to further develop the ability to support millions of people to gain the right skills to compete in today's changing jobs market, and give millions of children the opportunity to go to school and have access to health care, making them ready to traverse labour markets in the not too distant future (The World Bank, 2020, p.III)

In contrast, UNICEF promotes unconditional child grants based on children's inherent rights and vulnerabilities, marking a shift from viewing children's social assistance as charity to an entitlement. This rights-based approach aligns with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), establishing children's fundamental rights and the government's obligations to ensure child welfare. In particular, Article 27 requires:

> 3. States Parties, in accordance with national conditions and within their means, shall take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall, in case of need, provide material assistance and support

> programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing. (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, n.d)

As Leisering (2018) noted, while the term "universal" in social assistance is contested, in social policy, it commonly refers to “categorical” programs targeting specific population groups, such as children at a certain age or the elderly. In this context, 'universal' refers to a non-means-tested, unconditional, and tax-financed social assistance program (Leisering, 2018). Rights-based social protection identifies citizens as "claimants" rather than recipients or beneficiaries (Chopra & te Lintelo, 2011). While the CCT originated from the Latin American region, the idea of a child grant was originally inspired by South Africa’s Child Support Grant program, which was part of the post-apartheid policy aimed at achieving a social justice and redistribution agenda (Hölscher et al., 2014).

UNICEF has recently advanced this approach through its "universal child benefits" (UCB) framework, defined as "cash transfers, universal to the population of children, unconditional and paid regularly" (UNICEF, 2024, p.20). This human rights perspective became the basis for advocating for child grants to be “unconditional” rather than imposing conditions on social assistance. Imposing conditionalities undermines the inclusiveness of social protection programs, including social assistance (Roelen, 2014). Conditionalities contradict the principles of human rights. Applying conditionalities involves "expecting them (recipients) to overcome barriers that they have little to no control over" (Roelen 2014, p.63) and works against children’s rights. UNICEF advocates for UCB because it better aligns with children’s rights and because universal approaches achieve better outcomes in reducing child poverty and improving child well-being compared to narrowly targeted programs. Furthermore, as the leading proponent of child grants, UNICEF emphasises children’s particular vulnerability to poverty, arguing that “poverty in childhood is the root cause of poverty in adulthood” (UNICEF, 2024, p. 1).

While both models position children as deserving recipients, their different approaches to deservingness—the World Bank's conditional, targeted approach versus UNICEF's universal, rights-based approach—produced varying outcomes when adapted to Indonesia's social, political, and institutional context. The following section examines how these competing constructions of deservingness were negotiated across different governance levels.

4.3.2 The adoption and institutionalisation of CCT at the national level: Program Keluarga Harapan

> "The experience of 2005-2006 BLT (Unconditional cash transfers) taught us the importance of a new paradigm of poverty reduction, shifting from untargeted to targeted.

> Poverty reduction programs based on the household started to be introduced -> Program Keluarga Harapan." (Sumadi, 2018)

The above statement from a senior[16] Bappenas official signifies Indonesia's new approach to social assistance that institutionalised how children of poor families deserve social assistance. As extensive literature explores, the Indonesian national government adopted the CCT model, known as the Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH), in 2007 (Kwon & Kim, 2015; McCarthy et al., 2023). PKH's design explicitly identifies children from poor families as deserving of social assistance, particularly targeting those under five years old and school-aged children. Mothers or female adult members in eligible households became the proxies to receive cash transfers. The program targeted poor families with pregnant mothers, babies/toddlers and school-age children.[17] Over the past decade, the Indonesian national government has significantly scaled up PKH from a pilot program involving 388,000 households in 2007 to targeting 10 million households for the program by 2018. The target of 10 million households remains in place until 2024. In the following sections, I will discuss how these new notions of deserving children of poor families emerged as Indonesia adopted and institutionalised CCT.

The failure of BLT as a policy window and the role of the World Bank

The introduction of CCT in Indonesia shifted the notion of deservingness towards poor families with children, demonstrating how policy entrepreneurs use a crisis to introduce new policy ideas. The failure of Indonesia's first unconditional cash transfer (UCT) program, known as Bantuan Langsung Tunai (BLT) in 2005 and 2006, created what Kingdon calls a "policy window" – a critical moment when problems, policies and politics converge to enable policy change (cited in Béland & Howlett, 2016). Launched under President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), with Vice President Jusuf Kalla (JK) overseeing, BLT was introduced to offset the removal of fuel subsidies and aimed to support 19.2 million households, quickly becoming one of the most extensive cash transfer programs globally. However, the implementation of BLT was chaotic, leading to various social conflicts, mainly due to the issues of mistargeting (see Sumarto, 2021; Widianto, 2013). Studies have found that the rate of exclusion error of the UCT was 60%, and the inclusion error was 25% (Satriana, 2008, as cited in Kwon & Kim, 2015).

Like in many other developing countries, the World Bank acted as the primary policy entrepreneur introducing CCT to Indonesia (Kwon & Kim, 2015; Peck & Theodore, 2015). This

[16] When I use the term "senior government official", I refer to an echelon one (Deputy or Director General Level) and echelon two (Director Level)
[17] In 2017, new categories, the elderly and people with disability, were added as additional criteria for eligibility within the poor households.

study defines policy entrepreneurs as "international experts and technocrats working for international organisations, and domestic civil servants and national policy experts" (Ulriksen, 2019, p.126). World Bank officials, including a senior Indonesian economist, pursued multiple channels of influence. They first approached Vice President JK with CCT as a fuel subsidy compensation mechanism; however, this initial attempt was rejected because the World Bank advised the Vice President that CCT would require six months of preparation.[18] The World Bank assisted the Indonesian government in examining BLT's implementation problems, including conducting a study that found BLT targeting to have 47% poor exclusion and 45% non-poor inclusion rates (Alatas et al., 2012). Following the poor implementation of BLT due to the government's lack of capacity and experience in designing and delivering cash transfers, negative perceptions about BLT among politicians, state officials, and the public created a policy window for the introduction of CCT.

Crucially, a senior official from the World Bank simultaneously built a powerful coalition with Indonesian technocrats who shared their ideological approach to social protection, particularly within Bappenas and the National Team for Acceleration of Poverty Reduction (TNP2K), which sits under the Vice-President's Office, as discussed in Chapter Three. This "economic development" discourse coalition, predominantly comprising US-trained urban planners and economists, supported technical innovations such as the proxy-means-testing (PMT) for targeting beneficiaries, which became central to PKH's design and Indonesia's broader approach to social assistance programs. As one former World Bank Senior Economist explained:

> We were conducting a series of targeting experiments. Funded by the Dutch government, AusAID trust fund, PKPR… The World Bank collaborated with Bappenas and TNP2K. It was the beginning of what needed to be done. It later became TNP2K, and this was possible because we had a champion at BPS (Indonesia's Bureau of Statistics); everyone wanted to work together to fix it.[19]

In designing the CCT, the World Bank primarily collaborated with Bappenas, including arranging educational visits to Turkey. (Kwon & Kim, 2015; Peck & Theodore, 2015). The timing of CCT preparation was important as Bappenas officials were concerned about the fiscal burden of the BLT (Kwon & Kim, 2015). As Béland (2005) noted, timing is crucial when policy entrepreneurs seek to provide policy alternatives and gain political influence.

For government policymakers, PKH emerged as a politically feasible solution through design features that distinguished it from the existing BLT. Its narrower targeting, which focuses

[18] Zoom Interview with NG 4, 23 November 2021.
[19] Zoom Interview with RAT 2, 8 December 2021.

specifically on poor households with children, makes it less expensive than BLT's broader coverage. It also introduced conditionalities requiring health check-ups and school attendance. As a senior researcher from SMERU explained:

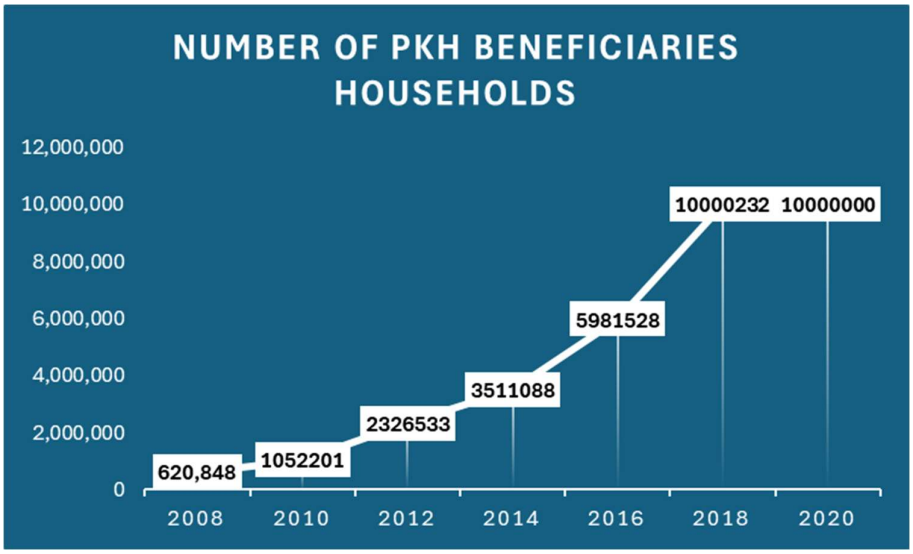
> The resistance towards PKH is far less than that towards BLT because PKH has specific conditions. So, it is not free money; a person has to do something. Even though there is no connection between receiving the money and not fulfilling the conditions, that is how the idea is getting buy-in. [20]

The national government's adoption of PKH is seen as a "middle ground" solution. It was not as generous as the existing BLT, as it targeted fewer households, specifically only poor households with children. However, at the same time, it still provided "compensation" for removing fuel subsidies to the poorest households and helped the government reduce social tensions. PKH's residual approach aligned with Indonesia's existing cultural idea that *'fakir miskin*' deserves assistance. Compared to the BLT, which has a more extensive coverage of 19.8 million households, PKH had minimal coverage when it was introduced by the national government.

Institutionalisation of PKH as part of the broader poverty reduction strategy

The successful adoption of PKH marked the beginning of a more profound institutional transformation in Indonesia's approach to poverty reduction and social protection. Bappenas officials, moving beyond their initial role in designing PKH, emerged as a key policy entrepreneur in institutionalising CCT within Indonesia's broader development framework.

Figure 4.1 PKH Expansion Over the Years



Source: Syamsulhakim & Khadijah 2021

[20] Zoom Interview with RAT 1, 7 December 2021.

As the planning agency responsible for developing Indonesia's five-year medium-term development plan *(Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Nasional - RPJMN*), Bappenas strategically positioned PKH within a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy. In 2007-2008, PKH began as a pilot program with 620,848 households and subsequently expanded to cover 10 million households by 2020, as shown in Figure 4.1. The 2005–2009 RPJMN marked the first time poverty reduction became a central development priority (Bappenas, 2005). In 2007, concurrent with PKH's introduction, Bappenas developed a three-cluster poverty reduction strategy: the first cluster on social assistance to target poor households; the second cluster on the community empowerment program PNPM *(Program Nasional Pemberdayaan Masyaraka*t); and the third cluster on micro-credit and entrepreneurship.

The strategic linkage of poverty reduction to crucial development outcomes, such as health and education, significantly contributed to PKH's political viability and popularity, distinguishing it from previous initiatives like the *Bantuan Langsung Tunai* (BLT). Similar to the global concept of CCT, the PKH narrative regarding poverty aimed to address "inter-generational poverty." Hence, the program aims to achieve health and education outcomes. Based on lessons from Latin American countries, Indonesian policymakers believe in these outcomes, which the World Bank facilitated.

> When we designed the program, what was important for the PKH family for the next generation was that they no longer be poor. So, the conditions are that they must go to health clinics and send their children to school.[21]

Further, this approach aligned with Indonesia's educational goals, notably the nine-year education mandate, and was reflected in the objectives of PKH as outlined in official Bappenas presentations. During this period, the national government focused on increasing the school enrolment rate. The national government introduced PKH to complement the "*Bantuan Siswa Miskin" (*Poor Student Assistance) program, providing school stipends to poor children.

Electoral politics and PKH program expansion

PKH became further institutionalised and expanded to advance the political agenda of the leaders, especially under the administration of the populist President, Jokowi (2014–2019 and 2019–2024). Soon after President Jokowi's administration started in 2014, PKH expanded from 3.5 million to six million households. It further scaled up in 2018 from six million to ten million households, as shown in Figure 4.1. Using social assistance programs for electoral politics also occurred during President Yudhoyono's administration, both for regional and

[21] Zoom Interview with NG1, 19 November 2022.

national elections (see Sumarto, 2021 for how electoral politics influenced the BLT distribution) Similarly, President Jokowi used social assistance programs that mostly targeted children and young people as his strategy to promote his populist image and to bring him political electoral benefits. President Jokowi was famous for his "welfare cards" approach, which he introduced during his presidential campaigns to win the 2014 and 2019 elections (Suryahadi & Izzati, 2022). This was despite his initial rejection of the idea of cash transfers when he was the Governor of Jakarta and during the Yudhoyono administration (Detikcom, 2022).

Despite his initial view on social assistance programs, President Jokowi continued to expand social assistance, including PKH, to institutionalise further these notions of deserving children of poor families. In 2018, President Jokowi expanded PKH to reach ten million households. The World Bank supported the expansion of PKH with a loan (World Bank, 2017). However, this politically driven expansion created tensions with the original policy entrepreneurs who had designed PKH. Senior officials in both Bappenas and TNP2K, the agencies that had been instrumental in PKH's initial design and implementation, expressed significant concerns about the program's rapid growth. Some of them even mentioned the idea of "scaling down PKH". TNP2K senior official who was involved in PKH commented how the program became less effective because it no longer targeted the "poorest":

> It all depends on the objectives. Will it be effective if we continue to expand PKH? PKH is meant to be for the poorest. We talk about conditionalities for health and education. Nevertheless, targeting those in higher quantiles will be less effective. Because of the conditionalities, the verification system became more complicated.[22]

Similarly, a Bappenas director was sceptical about the effectiveness of PKH, including reaching the “poorest. "Like PKH now has reached 10 million, but the targeting is still not right. The poorest do not receive it."[23] He also mentioned the idea of reducing PKH from ten million to eight million households so that the national government has fiscal space to increase social assistance coverage for the elderly and people with disability.

The disagreement between TNP2K and Bappenas officials in scaling up PKH also reflects the deteriorated relationship between technocrats and the World Bank[24]. Key officials in Bappenas commented on how the World Bank's report[25] and recommendations were not aligned with Bappenas: "The World Bank is too independent. They think they are very expert. (they) did

[22] Zoom interview with NG3, 19 November 2021.
[23] Zoom Interview with NG11, 8 February 2022
[24] A respected senior Indonesian World Bank official who are close with key officials in Bappenas and TNP2K was no longer working for the World Bank.
[25] He did not specified which report he was referring to but most likely the “Social Protection for Indonesia ’ s 2045 Vision” (World Bank, 2020b)

not want to adapt their recommendations to what we are thinking."[26] Bappenas officials were also frustrated because the World Bank bypassed Bappenas and went directly to the Ministry of Social Affairs with their Program-for-Results (PforR)[27] loan agenda for the PKH expansion.[28]

While PKH became institutionalised nationally, its implementation at the sub-national levels revealed the significant challenges and limitations produced by a centralised approach to social assistance. In areas like the Papua province, which has distinct geographical, cultural, and social characteristics from Indonesia's main island, such as Java, local officials view the design of PKH as unsuitable. As a CCT program, PKH is designed to require program facilitators to ensure conditionalities are met, including leading family development sessions (FDS). The requirement for PKH facilitators is challenging in most regions of Papua, which are widely dispersed across difficult terrain. As a Papua Province official explained:

> The PKH program might be suitable for the Java[29] context. However, we are in Papua, which has the characteristic of smaller groups spread across, so it would be difficult for the PKH approach to be implemented.[30]

The program's targeting mechanism also created tensions at the community level. In Sabang City, local officials found that PKH's poverty targeting approach generated social conflicts rather than helping their poorest residents:

> It was not easy for PKH, as there would be many complaints (ribut-ribut) at the village office because those who were not poor enough would receive it, while the poor did not receive it. Therefore, we made it universal, which would enable quicker and more accurate implementation.[31]

Moreover, PKH's family-based approach sometimes conflicted with local kinship structures and caregiving arrangements. In Papua, for instance, traditional extended family networks meant that children's care often extended beyond the nuclear family unit that PKH was designed to support. The program's rigid household-based targeting failed to account for these cultural variations in family structure and childcare responsibilities.

The challenges faced by sub-national governments in implementing PKH highlight broader issues in Indonesia's social assistance approach. While the national government promoted PKH as its flagship poverty reduction program, local experiences revealed how centrally

[26] Zoom interview with NG11, 8 February 2022
[27] PforR is a World Bank financing instrument that links fund disbursement directly to the achievement of specific program results while using the borrowing country's own institutions and processes.
[28] Zoom Interview with NG11, 8 February 2022
[29] Java is the main island of Indonesia, where 56% of the total population live. It is also the most developed region in Indonesia.
[30] Interview with LG3, 14 Dec 2021.
[31] Interview with LG20, 9 August 2022.

designed programs can struggle to accommodate Indonesia's regional diversity. These implementation challenges at the sub-national level would later influence some regional governments to explore alternative social assistance models, including child grants, which local officials view as a more suitable option for the local context.

The adoption and institutionalisation of CCT in Indonesia demonstrate how multiple factors converged to establish children of poor families as deserving recipients of social assistance. Three key factors that led to the institutionalisation of PKH are, firstly, the failure of BLT, which provided a conceptual window for policy entrepreneurs to provide alternative policy options that are more aligned with Indonesia's existing ideas of deservingness; CCT's key features, such as conditionalities and narrow targeting aligned with Indonesia's ideas of the deserving poor. Secondly, the timing of CCT also aligned with broader policy objectives of poverty reduction and achieving other development outcomes, such as education and health outcomes. Thirdly, the populist President Jokowi further scaled up PKH to reflect the idea of deserving poor children for political purposes. Over time, the critical policy entrepreneurs in Bappenas and TNP2K started to doubt the effectiveness of CCT. Moreover, implementation challenges at the sub-national level revealed PKH's limitations in accommodating Indonesia's regional diversity, leading some local governments to explore alternative approaches to supporting children through social assistance, particularly the child grant model.

4.3.3 The child grant model: national push-back and sub-national buy-in

Introducing child grants at the subnational level in Indonesia reveals a parallel, similar yet different discourse on the deservingness of children in social assistance programs, presenting an alternative to the national government's approach to social protection. In the child grant model, the idea is that all children deserve social assistance, regardless of their family's financial situation, without using poverty as a criterion for deservingness. In the following section, I will discuss how UNICEF, as a global international agency advocating for child rights, introduced the concept of child grants to the Indonesian government at both national and sub-national levels. The national government rejected the idea of a child grant, while the Papua Province and Sabang City governments adopted the concept of a child grant.

The national government's rejection of the idea of a child grant

Almost ten years after the World Bank introduced the concept of CCT to the Indonesian government, UNICEF, the global advocate for child grants, proposed a universal child grant to the Indonesian national government in 2017. UNICEF and Indonesia's Bureau of Statistics produced a report on child poverty in Indonesia, recommending a universal child grant (UNICEF Indonesia, 2017). In this report, UNICEF analysed child poverty in Indonesia and

highlighted how “Poverty disproportionately affects children: compared with adults or the general population, they are at higher risk of living below the poverty threshold” (UNICEF Indonesia, 2017, p.4)

In parallel to the World Bank's approach, UNICEF introduced the policy model to senior-level policymakers. However, UNICEF's attempt failed to convince Indonesian senior policymakers. UNICEF approached Indonesia’s Minister of Finance, who holds budgetary power. However, despite engagement with the Ministry of Finance and Bappenas, which is mandated to design specific policy designs, the idea of a child grant was rejected.

First, senior officials in Bappenas rejected the idea of a child grant because of the budget required for the approach: Indonesia has limited fiscal capacity for social protection. As a Deputy in Bappenas in charge of poverty reduction and social protection, he told me in our interview:

> UNICEF approached me with their 'Child Grant' proposal, offering assistance for Indonesian children and presenting fiscal modelling.[32] UNICEF claimed they had secured an agreement from Ibu SMI (Finance Minister). However, I questioned whether she (the Minister) truly understood the aspects of poverty reduction. Their proposed child grant would cost 23 trillion rupiahs (AUD 23 billion) annually. This would compete with our health budget. That's far too expensive.[33]

In addition to the main concern about the fiscal burden, the national policymakers cannot accept the idea of a “universal child grant” for another reason: the policy model does not explicitly target poor households. A Bappenas director emphasised that Indonesia's social assistance must focus on the needy. Commenting on the Papua Provincial universal child grant targeting Indigenous Papuans, he questioned: "If in Papua, it is given to all Indigenous Papuans, what about the children of the *Bupati* (District Head)?"[34] Similarly, a senior TNP2K official who was part of the coalition that both designed and criticised the implementation of PKH made the following comments:

> I still believe that social assistance should target the poor and vulnerable. It is for long-term investment… but for children under five years old, we proposed that it should be for all children because now, even the conditionalities (in PKH) are not functioning well”[35]

[32] Fiscal modelling is an analysis to calculate how much it cost for social assistance programs to be implemented, and a simulation to estimate its intended impact if the program is introduced.
[33] Zoom Interview with NG 9, 19 January 2022.
[34] Interview with NG 11, 8 February 2022.
[35] Interview with NG1, 20 November 2021

Her statement reveals a shift in perspective: disappointment that PKH no longer enforces strict conditions and limited acceptance of universality, which is only extended to children under five years old, rather than UNICEF's promoted vision of universal child grants for all children.

The statements from national government officials reflect the three fundamental reasons why national policymakers rejected the child grant idea. First, fiscal constraints and concerns about introducing a new universal program made officials hesitate. Second, ideological and institutional factors created barriers - the government's strong preference for residual social assistance conflicted with the child grant's universal principles. Also, existing legal frameworks specifically limited support to "children from poor families" under Law No. 35 of 2014. Third, the timing worked against UNICEF's advocacy efforts. Unlike CCT, which emerged when Indonesia sought an alternative during the BLT and fuel crisis, UNICEF proposed child grants after PKH had already gained institutional roots and strong political support from President Jokowi as a flagship program. This combination of fiscal concerns, institutional-ideological barriers and unfavourable timing effectively blocked the adoption of universal child grants at the national level.

Sub-national governments' buy-in and local adaptation to the idea of the child grant

In contrast to the national government's resistance, sub-national governments in Papua Province and Sabang City adopted the idea of universal child grants. The Provincial Government of Papua (PGP) adopted a child grant and introduced a pilot program in three districts known as Bangga Papua (*Bangun Generasi dan Keluarga Sejahtera Papua* or Building a Prosperous Papuan Generation and Family) in 2018. PGP piloted the Bangga Papua program, targeting all Indigenous Papuan children aged four years old, and the grant was given to the mothers. Meanwhile, the Geunaseh (*Gerakan Untuk Anak Sehat* or Healthy Children Movement) Program was launched in 2019, initially targeting all children in the City of Sabang in Aceh Province, aged zero to six years old, to address the issue of stunting and improve children's nutrition.[36] These two regional governments introduced their own social assistance programs because of the regions' Special Autonomy status and fund allocation (*Dana Otsus* or Otsus Fund). Regions with Special Autonomy Status in Indonesia include Papua Province and Aceh Province, which were pilot areas for the child grant scheme, where these regions received higher-level funding per capita and had more authority over decision making across major development sectors (Huda et al., 2020).

[36] In 2023, the Sabang government reduced the coverage of Geunaseh to only target children in their first 1,000 days or ages 0–23 months, whereas children 24–59 months can continue to receive the program if they are diagnosed as malnourished.

Table 4.1: Sub-national social assistance programs for children

Program Name – Sub-national government	Main Objectives	Eligibility	Coverage	Years implemented/status of the program
Bangga Papua – Papua Province	Improve the health and nutrition of children under four Reduce the financial burden on Indigenous Papuan parents with young children	Indigenous Papuan under four years old – given to mothers/female caregivers	3 out of 39 districts[37] 31,917 children (23,425 legal guardians)	2018–2020 (suspended in 2020)
Geunaseh – Sabang City	To address malnutrition and stunting.	2019–2022: All children 0–6 years old 2023 onwards: Children 0–23 months and stunted/wasted children 24–59 months	4,000 children (2019)	2019–2023 (still on-going in 2024)

While the national government constructed the idea that children from poor families are deserving, the sub-national government framed the idea of deservingness differently, not by using the term "poverty," but by focusing on local priority issues. The PGP provided cash grants to all Indigenous Papuan children under the age of four, funding this initiative through the *Special Autonomy Fund (Otsus Fund).* The PGP framed this universal approach as an affirmative policy targeting Indigenous Papuan children. The main objective of the Otsus fund, which funded the pilot, is to improve the human development outcomes of Indigenous Papuans.[38] Further, the program objectives are also linked to the health and nutrition outcomes of Indigenous Papuan Children.

The Sabang Government framed the idea of deserving children around the vulnerability of children to stunting and malnutrition. This focus on nutrition led the government of Sabang and UNICEF to design a child grant targeting children aged zero to seven years old. The primary feature of the child grant in Sabang is that it targets all children in Sabang universally. However, the local Health Department made a few adjustments to the program design, for instance, imposing conditions and reducing age eligibility, as shown in Table 4.1. The child grant approach in Papua and Sabang marked a significant departure from national

[37] This is before Papua Provinces split into three new provinces in 2022: Central Papua, South Papua and Highland Papua.
[38] Papua's special autonomy fund has a specific mandate that it needs to benefit the Indigenous Papuan population (Huda et al., 2020). In the three districts selected as pilot, most of the population were Indigenous Papuans.

government poverty-based targeting. This demonstrates how regional autonomy enabled different constructions of deservingness.

Policy entrepreneurs: international agencies, consultants and the local policy actors

Representatives of international agencies, acting as policy entrepreneurs, played a role in introducing the concept of child grants at the sub-national level. In Sabang, UNICEF introduced the idea of a child grant to the Sabang City Government. While the Australian government's (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade or DFAT) bilateral programs, MAHKOTA and KOMPAK, introduced the child grant idea to PGP with the support of UNICEF, providing an impact evaluation of the program.[39] The international organisations also provided technical support to design and implement the pilot of these child grants, supporting the local government, which has limited capacity to design and implement this child grant program.

As policy entrepreneurs, representatives from UNICEF and the DFAT programs introduced the idea, framed the problem, and proposed potential solutions to the local government. UNICEF and DFAT program representatives first introduced the poverty reduction discourse to frame child grants, offering micro-simulations to demonstrate to local governments the program's potential impact on poverty reduction.[40] However, while the international agencies initially introduced child grants as part of the poverty reduction agenda, both sub-national governments adopted the program. They framed it around nutrition and improving health outcomes.

While representatives from international agencies played a key role in introducing the child grant idea, local government officials, particularly those in Bappeda (Regional Development Planning Agency), acted as crucial intermediaries or local policy entrepreneurs in adapting the child grant model to local contexts. The state officials referred to PKH implementation and provided a rationale for how the CCT approach did not fit their local context, as discussed in the previous section on how the sub-national government responded to PKH implementation.

For instance, the Head of Bappeda in Papua Province contrasted how the national government applied the concept of the “nuclear family” in Java to design PKH, even though this approach did not fit the Papuan context.

[39] See Huda et al. (2020) for the details of how KOMPAK and MAHKOTA, two DFAT-funded bilateral programs, and UNICEF provided technical assistance to the Papua Provincial government.
[40] Interview with IA3, 5 August 2022.

> Policy needs to highlight the diversity of Indonesia… the reason we use children as the basis of transfer is that in Papua, when we talked about Papuan family, there is *kekerabatan* (kinship) that includes the extended family"[41]

He reflected on how the national government's household-based social assistance, such as the BLT, is unsuitable in the Papuan context because each household receives the same amount of money regardless of the number of individuals in the household. The household social assistance is not aligned with Papua's kinship system. His statement also refers to how, in the Papuan kinship system, children are often cared for by their extended families or relatives instead of their birth parents. This is similar to the context of the Child Support Grant in Africa, which the South African government designed to respond to the local context where children were not necessarily being cared for in a "nuclear family structure" or by their birth parents due to economic reasons (Patel, 2017).

Furthermore, in institutionalising child grants, local policy entrepreneurs played a crucial role in securing political commitment from local leaders, such as the Governor and Mayor. For PGP, Bappeda officials leveraged the political momentum of the 2018 regional election and linked the Bangga Papua program to the incumbent Governor's "Gerbang Mas" election campaign, a governor-led initiative that includes improving the nutritional outcomes of Indigenous Papuan children (Ramah, 2019).

Similarly, the former head of Bappeda in Sabang had acted as a local policy entrepreneur for the child grant program. He described how he strategically secured both political and technical support before advancing the initiative. When I asked him whether introducing a child grant was part of the Mayor's election promise, he explained:

> The initiative was not politically motivated. I presented the idea directly to the Mayor, who supported it. Once UNICEF committed its support for the implementation, I advocated for the program.[42]

Furthermore, local officials in Sabang gained legitimacy by adopting a "universal approach" rather than a poverty-targeting scheme. A senior Sabang official explained: "Before Geunaseh, Sabang already had a universal special education program from primary to high school. It has been going on under the old Mayor for ten years."[43] This established practice was introduced by the previous Mayor's universal support through school stipends, which predated UNICEF's child grant initiative. A UNICEF staff member noted that Sabang's existing

[41] Interview with LG3, 4 December 2021
[42] Interview with LG 20, 9 August 2022.
[43] Interview with LG20, 9 August 2022.

commitment to non-poverty targeted support made the city particularly receptive to the child grant proposal.[44] This suggests that a child grant was more acceptable because it aligned with existing local initiatives.

The local state officials also aligned the local initiative with the national government's priorities. In both regions, the local government linked the child grant objective to nutrition and health outcomes, particularly following the National Strategy (*Stranas)* for the Acceleration of Stunting Prevention 2018-2024, which was led and signed by the Vice-President in 2018 (UNICEF, 2024). This strategy required local governments to prioritise nutrition initiatives. However, linking the child grant program with health outcomes has led to a divergence from the idea of the child grant model, based on the principles of child rights, including unconditionality and universality.

Child grant program divergence and the struggle to maintain the idea of "deserving children"

The implementation of child grants at the sub-national level reveals how local governments modified the policy model to fit their local context, which de Sardan (2020) calls "diverging local adaptations". When institutionalising the child grant, the Sabang government deliberately positioned *Geunaseh* under the local health department rather than the Social Affairs department, an unusual arrangement for cash transfer programs in Indonesia. Bappeda officials used this strategy of engaging the health department instead of social affairs to ensure that the child grant could use "universal" principles rather than poverty-targeting. According to key officials in Sabang, if the child grant were under social affairs, the regulation would require the Sabang government to use DTKS as the basis for targeting. The local government did not want to use the poverty-targeting method based on its experience with community tension in implementing national government social assistance programs.[45]

However, putting the child grant under the health department creates unintended consequences. While initially designed with UNICEF as an "unconditional cash transfer", the *Geunaseh* program became a conditional cash transfer. The local government, particularly the district health office, has introduced health checks at the *Pos Pelayan Terpadu (Posyandu).*

[44] Interview with IA3, 5 August 2022.
[45] Interview with LG20, 9 August 2022.

Figure 4.2: Geunaseh distribution in Posyandu

Source: Author's personal documentation

Further, in 2023, the Sabang government also reduced the program's coverage by narrowing the age criteria from all children under six to children under three. The requirements for Geunaseh became specifically for children in the first 1,000 days and those who are suffering from stunting and wasting. Sabang's local official provided the following justification:

> Since there is a national program, we follow it. This is to ensure that the food and nutrition provided is right on target according to the needs of children with stunting. (cited from Zairi, 2023)

The Papua case demonstrates even greater challenges to program sustainability. After only two years of piloting the child grant, the provincial government suspended the Bangga Papua program in 2020. Multiple factors contributed to this decision: One of the reasons was that the Papua Province hosted the national sports event (PON) in 2020, which became the focus of the provincial government's financial resources. This led to the Bangga Papua being deprioritised. Further, as Bangga Papua relied on the political support of the Governor and selected key senior officials in Bappeda, changes in the leadership affected the program's sustainability.[46] As a mid-level officer in Bappeda, PGP highlighted

> People commented that it looks like the program. It is only for campaign purposes. When we started Bangga Papua, it was just before the governor was set to run for his second term.[47]

Both cases demonstrate how the sub-national governments of Papua and Sabang adopted the children's grant model as an alternative idea for deserving children. While international agencies initially introduced the concept of child grants using poverty reduction discourse, local governments sought to align the idea with health objectives, specifically stunting reduction and improved nutrition. Local state officials also developed their own rationale based

[46] Interview LG2, 13 December 2021
[47] Interview LG4, 13 May 2022

on their negative experiences with the national government and continued to follow their existing strategies and approaches. However, the institutionalisation of the child grant model in both Papua Province and Sabang City was less successful than the CCT at the national level due to the various institutional and political issues both governments faced.

4.4 Falling through the cracks: How social assistance programs exclude vulnerable children

While the Indonesian government has institutionalised the notion that "children of poor families" deserve social assistance, this narrow construction of deservingness has created significant gaps in social protection. This section illustrates that while children of poor families have received substantial attention from the State through social assistance programs targeting children, Indonesia's social protection policy has not yet paid enough attention to children as a "differentiated group with different needs" (Sabates-Wheeler & Roelen, 2011, p.183) This section examines how three interrelated factors: program design, bureaucratic practices and implementation dynamics create patterns of exclusion in Indonesia's social assistance programs.

First, children who do not fit into existing "traditional family norms" categorised as "vulnerable children" often lack adequate support from state programs While the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) formally recognizes these children through its social rehabilitation programs - classifying them as either "children requiring special protection" or "children requiring social function development" - the support remains limited. MOSA's social rehabilitation program identifies 18 different categories of vulnerable children, including street children and children in conflict with the law (Kemensos 2020). Still, these programs receive significantly less attention and funding compared to family-based assistance. This is evident in the case of *Program Kesejahteraan Sosial Anak (PKSA)*, or the Children's Social Welfare Program, established in 2010 to support vulnerable children outside of family structures. Despite its broad mandate, PKSA has not received the same technical support or political backing as PKH. As one academic and child rights activist observed, "Policy actors only focused on what can be tweaked from PKH to fulfil children's rights. However, PKH is insufficient; there must be other programs."[48]

This disparity in program support reflects an implicit hierarchy of deservingness in Indonesia's social assistance system. Beazley's (2003) study of street children in Indonesia powerfully illustrates this dynamic, showing how both state and society construct these children as

[48] Interview with RAT 8, 11 April 2022.

'undeserving' through two key mechanisms: First, their existence outside traditional family units directly challenges state ideology that positions the family as the primary institution for child welfare. Second, their visibility in public spaces - particularly streets - leads to their categorisation as “deviants” rather than vulnerable children requiring protection. This marginalisation through spatial and social exclusion reflects deeper attitudes about which children deserve state support.

This narrow focus on cash transfer support through PKH overlooks the broader needs of vulnerable children. While PKH provides cash transfers to poor families, the lack of complementary social services keeps many children trapped in cycles of poverty.[49] This reveals a fundamental limitation in the government's approach: addressing income poverty while leaving unaddressed the structural issues that perpetuate children's vulnerability. This includes providing more comprehensive support for children of poor families beyond providing household cash transfer programs. This demonstrates how program design choices, driven by constructions of deservingness, can systematically exclude children who do not fit within conventional household frameworks, regardless of their level of need and otherwise hamper policy approaches.

Second, a significant disconnect exists between how the state determines deservingness through technical criteria and how communities understand deservingness. The national government's use of *Data Terpadu Kesejahteraan Sosial* (DTKS) or Unified Database and proxy-means testing to identify the "deserving poor" has created systemic exclusions that reflect broader problems with poverty targeting approaches.

Since adopting poverty-targeted social assistance, the state has become the primary arbiter of deservingness through its national poverty database. Studies have found that econometric methods of measuring poverty are not aligned with local conceptions of poverty (McCarthy et al., 2023) or a community's understanding of poverty (Alatas et al., 2012). It creates "exclusion errors" where genuinely poor families miss out on support. As one local teacher in Aceh Besar described:

> In my school, there is the PIP (Program Indonesia Pintar)[50] , but the main criterion is to have a PKH Card. If a child does not have a PKH, they must have a "poor letter" (Surat Miskin) to indicate that they are poor. But even after the letter, that child still has not received the card (PKH card), even though they need it. I don't know why.[51]

[49] Interview with RAT8, 11 April 2022
[50] Program Indonesia Pintar (PIP) is a national government program that provides a school stipend targeted at children from the lowest socio-economic income level.
[51] A schoolteacher in FGD2 Aceh Besar, August 2022.

The fundamental challenge lies in how DTKS, as the basis for poverty-targeting programs, fails to capture the dynamic nature of poverty. While household poverty status can change rapidly due to various shocks and circumstances, the database updates are infrequent and bureaucratic. A study found that not only the limited capacity of the regional government to update the data, but also the lack of clear guidance from the central government, has hampered the ability of the regional government to conduct data updating (Widyaningsih & Toyamah Nina, 2023)

The national government's approach to program integration has further exacerbated those exclusion issues. PKH eligibility has become a gateway to other forms of social assistance, including PIP. As one PKH facilitator explained:

> Those with PKH would receive other assistance. There is a disparity between those who do not receive and those who have received (PKH). Because once you have received PKH, you are the priority.[52]

While policymakers designed this integration to ensure sufficient support through multiple programs, implementing this approach created issues such as jealousy within the community, as households that received PKH would also receive other social assistance programs. At the same time, those excluded from PKH would be excluded from other social assistance programs. Only during the COVID-19 pandemic did the national government roll out various programs, including the BLT Desa, to address this gap or exclusion errors.

Third, implementation practices at the local level often generate exclusion through various mechanisms that try to distinguish between those who are “deserving” and “undeserving” of social assistance. The most visible example is "labelling" practice, where local Social Affairs offices and facilitators mark PKH recipients' houses with program logos or wall paintings. During fieldwork in Bintan, I observed PKH program logos painted on the front of recipients’ homes. Local Dinsos officials proudly described this as their “local innovation”, viewing it as a way to ensure that “undeserving” households voluntarily opt out of the PKH program.[53]

This practice of “house labelling” is common in Indonesia and some countries that implement CCT. CCT program implementers use it to reduce leakage and mistargeting in the CCT program. In Peru, for example, Piccoli and Gillespie (2022) found that recipients of Juntos, the country’s CCT program, were required to display the program's flag and slogan on and inside

[52] FGD PI 2, 21 June 2022.
[53] FGD LG1, 29 June 2022

their homes. In Indonesia, PKH implementers expect “undeserving” recipients to voluntarily leave the program to avoid their houses being labelled. This practice reflects how “shaming” by labelling recipients' houses removes these undeserving recipients. A World Bank study found that 22.8% of those who left PKH did so because they feared their homes would be labelled (Syamsulhakim & Khadijah, 2021). This study criticised this approach, noting that it created stigma and pressure for households who genuinely needed assistance but felt too ashamed to continue receiving it.

Program implementers often overlook the negative consequences of this practice. Labelling can create stigma and reinforce negative stereotypes about program recipients, both within the community and among recipients themselves. A study in Brebes district, Indonesia, found that this labelling practice has contributed to negative self-perception among recipients and prejudice from their communities (Habibullah et al., 2024).

In sum, while PKH has institutionalised support for children from poor families, its narrow construction of deservingness has created three distinct patterns of exclusion. First, the focus on family-based targeting has marginalised vulnerable children outside traditional household structures, while the program's dominance has led to underfunding of other crucial support for vulnerable children. Second, the state's technical approach to determining deservingness through the DTKS database conflicts with the community's understanding of need, systematically excluding children that communities consider deserving of support. Furthermore, using PKH eligibility to target other social assistance programs has also created further exclusion for those who are excluded from PKH but still need social assistance programs. Third, local implementation practices, particularly through labelling, generate additional barriers that reinforce narrow definitions of deservingness. These patterns reveal how program design, targeting mechanism and implementation practices collectively create gaps in social protection for vulnerable children.

4.5 Explaining Indonesia's notions of deserving children

This section examines how ideas about deserving children shape Indonesia's adoption of child-focused social assistance programs. I analyse why the national government adopts the CCT approach of supporting children from poor families, while rejecting the rights-based universal child grants. Three key factors shape this outcome. First, the economic development discourse coalition dominates Indonesia's poverty reduction and social protection agenda, promoting social investment principles that align with CCT's approach. Second, the hegemony of social investment thinking influences how national and sub-national governments design social assistance programs for children, even when sub-national governments adopt

alternative models, such as child grants. Third, Indonesia's sociocultural values align naturally with CCT's targeted approach to poor families rather than universal child grants. While CCT and child grants aim to support children, their different constructions of deservingness—CCT's focus on poor families versus child grants' rights-based universality—generate varying acceptance levels within Indonesia's institutional and cultural context. This analysis demonstrates how the convergence between social investment ideology and existing sociocultural values shapes child-focused social assistance policy while creating challenges for rights-based approaches that emphasise universality and unconditional support.

4.5.1 Policy coalitions

First, a senior Indonesian World Bank official, together with senior technocrats in Bappenas and TNP2K, formed a powerful coalition that successfully institutionalised CCT. This coalition significantly influences the Indonesian national government's poverty reduction strategies and lays the groundwork for Indonesia's social protection system.

Bappenas senior technocrats played an instrumental role in designing Indonesia's CCT, as discussed by Peck and Theodore (2015) and Kim and Kwon (2015). Meanwhile, TNP2K, operating as an ad-hoc institution under the Vice President's office, also played a role in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of PKH (see McCarthy & Sumarto, 2018; Olken, 2019). As a senior official in TNP2K explained:

> In 2006, the World Bank team met with Pak Bambang (TNP2K) and Ibu Vivi (Bappenas), introducing CCT, and Professor Tarsisio came to Indonesia. The Philippines adopted it first, and then we (Indonesia) adopted it.[54]

These technocrats belong to the same "epistemic community" (Schwegler, 2011), mostly US-trained economists and urban planners, who share ideologies similar to those of the World Bank. This policy coalition, comprising the World Bank, TNP2K, and Bappenas, primarily views social protection as a contributor to economic growth. As Gliszczynski (2015) pointed out,

> …economic growth and efficiency are core principles of the current model of SP; basic SP is focused on those groups who are most vulnerable and who promise to have the most impact on economic growth in the future. (p.10)

Further, a broader coalition of national and international development economists actively supported key officials in Bappenas and TNP2K in promoting Indonesia's CCT model. Development economists from the World Bank, Abdul Latif Jamil Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), and a national think tank, SMERU Research Institute, formed this broader coalition. (Datta, et

[54] Interview with NG 1, 20 November 2021.

al., 2014). As Von Gliszczynski (2015) emphasised, international policy coalitions used “scientific evidence” as one of their most critical discursive practices to promote global policy models.

The coalition’s primary contribution was generating technical evidence through statistical data, quantitative studies and impact evaluations to support the national government’s decision-making. J-PAL specifically employed the Randomised Control Approach (RCT) to evaluate CCT’s effectiveness. De Sardan (2020) argues that policy advocates who promote CCT use the RCT methodology to promote CCT as the "travelling model" across countries. The economic development coalition legitimised and advanced CCT adoption in Indonesia by producing these technical evaluations and evidence-based studies. They created “politics of knowledge” that ignored other ways of knowing that do not serve their shared ideological interest (McCarthy et al., 2023).

The coalition of actors applied "economic development" discourse to promote the policy ideas of CCT and frame the notions of "deserving poor" in Indonesia based on their understanding of poverty. According to Leisering and Gliszczynski:

> CCT as a model is strongly anchored in the new economic development discourse of the 1990s, according to which the poor are rational agents and potential contributors to economic growth, and children are the economic agents of the future. (p.335)

Moreover, this dominant coalition of actors primarily focuses on income poverty or poverty calculations based on expenditure, employing a money-metric approach. This paradigm views poverty as a lack of income; hence, providing cash transfers will help the poor address their financial constraints and enable them to access health and education services. One of my key informants, who was involved in the design of PKH, tried to rationalise the CCT approach:

> The objective of PKH is to stop the chain of poverty. The way I used to explain PKH… when a scavenger or farmer is pregnant, but she must go scavenging, or she has to go to a health clinic, if she goes scavenging, she can get 20,000-30,000 Rupiah (AUD 2-3), but if she goes to a health clinic, she will not get the money. Because she needs to pick up garbage in the morning, she chooses not to go to *Posyandu.* That was the opportunity cost that must be taken into consideration. Between 15 and 20 years, children will be better off if they are not trapped.[55]

This dominant narrative on income poverty focuses on improving household income through cash transfers but fails to acknowledge the structural drivers that trap households in poverty. These structural barriers, such as a lack of access to land and job opportunities, in the case

[55] Interview with NG 1, 20 November 2021.

of women in Aceh Jaya, made recipients of cash transfer programs like PKH stuck in poverty. A study on the livelihoods of PKH families found that while PKH families receive the PKH program, they mostly do not have access to other complementary livelihood interventions, such as vocational training schemes or access to loans and grants to scale up their small businesses (MAHKOTA & SMERU, 2020). This absence of integrated support stems from the fragmentation of government programs and poor coordination among poverty reduction initiatives.[56]

Rather than addressing these structural barriers, the policy coalition attributes poverty to individual behaviours, promoting conditional cash transfers as a tool for behavioural change. The focus lies not only on monetary assistance but also on altering recipient behaviour to align with prescribed conditions, as exemplified in PKH. This approach overlooks the systematic barriers that hinder access to education and healthcare among the most vulnerable populations. This is illustrated by the following statement from a former World Bank Indonesian Senior Economist who was part of the policy coalition in introducing CCT:

> PKH is not just about money but about assisting the family and the family development session to ensure they do it (the conditionalities) for human capital. That is what it needed to be. We cannot see social protection as just about money; it is about changing behaviour and their situation. That is what needs to be emphasised—their ability to prevent and promote.[57]

The World Bank economist's statement exemplifies how the economic development discourse coalition reduces poverty to an individual problem requiring behavioural solutions. While studies show that CCTs may improve education and health outcomes, the poor quality of services available to low-income populations means that families remain trapped in poverty despite receiving the cash transfer (Kusumaningrum et al., 2021). This view ignores the structural nature of poverty that prevents children of poor families from accessing health and education services.

The economic development coalition's individualistic view of poverty also shapes how it constructs deservingness differently for children and their parents. Childhood studies scholars have analysed how social policies often frame children as “deserving poor” while simultaneously casting their parents, particularly mothers, as “undeserving poor” who bear responsibility for their children’s situation (Hölscher et al., 2014; Wells, 2011). This creates a fundamental tension with rights-based approaches to social assistance - instead of treating

[56] MAHKOTA and SMERU’s (2020) study found that while there are vocational trainings and livelihood programs by other Ministries such as Ministry of Small Medium Enterprise or Ministry of Agriculture, these interventions are not specifically targeting PKH recipient.
[57] Interview with RAT 2, 8 December 2021.

support as children's entitlement, it becomes conditional on parental compliance with state-defined behavioural requirements.

Conversely, the “child’s rights” policy coalition, initially formed around deinstitutionalisation efforts, comprised UNICEF, Save the Children, and national think tanks like Puskapa-UI working on child protection issues, which have limited influence on the broader poverty reduction agenda. While successful in advocating for institutional reform of *panti* or orphanages, the “child rights” policy coalition had varying approaches to the connection between poverty and child welfare. As Babington (2015) pointed out, the discourse of deinstitutionalisation and children’s rights in Indonesia initially did not explicitly link to the issue of poverty among many government officials and key policy actors working on children’s rights in Indonesia. This gap is reflected in an interview with a senior academic working on children’s rights in Indonesia, who made the following reflection:

> … we were missing a step. The focus was returning the children from *panti* to their own families, but what about the system that made them (parents) send the children to *panti* in the first place? They (the parents/family) have reasons; they were vulnerable. Maybe I am guilty of that; I was part of it.[58]

Her self-reflection highlighted how many child rights advocates succeeded on the deinstitutionalisation agenda, but had limited influence or engagement on the issues of poverty that led families to send their children to institutions in the first place.

Only around 2017 did UNICEF introduce the Universal Child Grant in Indonesia, primarily using the poverty discourse rather than advocating for children’s rights. Following a strategy similar to the World Bank’s earlier approach to promoting CCT, UNICEF produced a statistical report on child poverty to engage with the “economic development” discourse coalition within the Indonesian government, particularly Bappenas and the Ministry of Finance. However, national policymakers, especially Bappenas, did not accept UNICEF’s policy proposal, as the national government focused on expanding PKH and strongly believed that cash transfers for poor families should be conditional rather than unconditional. Similarly, UNICEF was slow to introduce the concept of a universal child grant as a policy model at the global level (Von Gliszczynski, 2015).

The legal framework in Indonesia created additional barriers for UNICEF and the child rights policy coalition in promoting universal child grants. While Law No. 35 of 2014 mandates the government to provide social protection for children, it states explicitly that "children from poor

[58] Interview with RAT 8, 11 April 2022.

families have the right to receive government assistance." This targeted approach in the legislation weakens the legal foundation for universal child grants, which would benefit all children regardless of their family's economic status. The law's emphasis on poverty-based targeting effectively limits the scope of social assistance programs, making it challenging to implement truly universal child benefits.

4.5.2 Social investment hegemony

In addition to the roles of policy coalitions and epistemic communities, we must consider the social investment hegemony that reinforces the notion that children deserve social assistance. The social investment hegemony influenced the emergence of CCT, which started in Latin American countries, especially Brazil and Mexico (Fenwick, 2017; Papadopoulos & Velázquez Leyer, 2016). The social investment paradigm focused on broader human capital development, highlighting that social policy should focus on “Investing in human capital to provide the necessary resources for people to face economic risks, promoting co-responsibility, not only rights, guaranteeing equality of opportunities and prioritising active policies rather than passive forms of social protection” (Papadopoulos & Velázquez Leyer, 2016, p.436). In investing in human capital development, the social investment paradigm views investments in children as essential for future economic growth.

Accordingly, CCT models, emphasising health and education conditionalities, align with this narrative of investing in human capital to break intergenerational poverty. This idea is popular among politicians and policymakers, as investing in children is seen as a pathway out of poverty, where children from poor families can be responsible for themselves in the future (Papadopoulos & Velázquez Leyer, 2016; Peck & Theodore, 2015).

The social investment hegemony led to a policy convergence between those who support the economic development agenda and child rights advocates, which made the objective of constructing children as the most deserving recipients of social assistance. While existing literature often frames CCT and child grants as conflicting models, both models share common goals, especially that families will move out of poverty by targeting children, and that health and education outcomes will improve. Jenson (2010) called this the ‘polysemic discourse’ of the social investment paradigm that various networks can use. The ‘polysemic discourse’ of the social investment paradigm allows for varied interpretations and applications across different networks. The social investment paradigm can be supported by those with “neoliberal” ideas, such as the World Bank, as well as UNICEF, which promotes the vulnerability of children and focuses on human rights.

The social investment paradigm has significantly shaped how sub-national governments implement their child grant programs, leading them to diverge from the original principles of human rights and children's rights. While the child grants policy model emphasises unconditional and universal support based on children's rights, the dominance of social investment thinking has influenced sub-national governments to modify these principles, compromising the fundamental rights-based framework of these programs. This is evident in both Bangga Papua and Geunaseh programs, where local officials framed the rationale for their child grants primarily around health objectives, particularly improving nutrition. The hegemony of social investment thinking led the Sabang government to impose health check-up conditions, while the Papuan provincial government employed narratives of human development and Indigenous Papuan children's well-being to justify their program.

4.5.3 Sociocultural values, the rights discourse and poor families

Indonesia's existing sociocultural values make social assistance based on rights, including children's rights, unacceptable at present in the Indonesian context. On the other hand, the World Bank's CCT model that targets only children of poor families is more aligned with Indonesia's existing notions of deservingness based on Islamic values: "*fakir miskin"*. The influence of Islamic values, such as "*fakir miskin"* and how *Zakat* should be given to orphan children, influences notions of deserving children. These values influence Indonesia's residual social policy, which remains based on charity rather than providing social assistance as an entitlement to the poor. While in principle, both state and society agree that social assistance should be given to "the poorest". However, determining who is "the poorest" is often contentious, as discussed in the previous section, and the state and community have different conceptions of poverty.

Furthermore, Indonesia's broader social policy discourse has not yet entirely accepted the idea of incorporating social assistance programs into citizens' rights, including those for children. In Indonesia, health and education are essential services that are considered rights for citizens. Hence, the national government adopted the universal approach to health and education. Like international trends, providing education and health services to everyone is widely supported; however, as elsewhere, giving money to everyone through a monthly cash transfer is highly controversial (Devereux, 2021). Indonesia's social protection approach reflects a productivist perspective where the state's role is limited, the market provides social security, and those who cannot contribute rely on family or community-based schemes (Yuda, 2018). This productivist strategy prioritises economic growth over social policy, focusing state investment on areas such as education and health that enhance industrial competitiveness, while keeping social expenditures modest in other regions (Rosser & Murphy, 2023). The

approach also privileges formal sector workers who contribute to economic productivity, while other groups receive limited state support by default.

Further, conditional cash transfer aligns with the Indonesian notions of *"hak and kewajiban"* or "rights and duties" of citizens. Existing literature has highlighted how rights cannot be mobilised in the Indonesian context (Berenschot et al., 2016), especially rights to social protection (Rosser & van Diermen, 2016). In contrast, Asian societies influenced by Confucianism (Yuda, 2018; Cook and Kwon, 2007) emphasise the idea of the state as a Higher Authority and "the citizens must be loyal and obedient to the government" (Yuda, 2018). Similarly, the idea of rights always goes hand-in-hand with obligations (Gibbings, 2016), especially where individual rights are seen as less important than collective interests (Yuda, 2018). This makes the idea of conditionalities in CCT more accepted in Asian societies than the 'unconditional' child grant model.

These notions of "rights and duties" have also influenced how sub-national governments adopted yet departed from the main principles of child grants. As discussed, UNICEF introduced the principles of unconditional grants to the Sabang government. However, the Sabang government imposed conditions for parents to take their children for health check-ups, suggesting that citizens must do their duties before getting their entitlement. Furthermore, in the context of children's issues and the child rights discourse in Indonesia, rather than the state being primarily responsible for fulfilling children's rights, the Indonesian government tends to place greater responsibility on parents (Siagian et al., 2019). The fulfilment of children's rights depends on the parents' obligation to meet program conditions.

This section has demonstrated how specific notions of deserving children enabled CCT's successful institutionalisation in Indonesia, while rights-based child grants gained less traction. Three key factors shaped this outcome. First, the economic development discourse coalition actively dominated Indonesia's poverty reduction and social protection agenda. This coalition primarily framed poverty as an income issue, promoting the idea that children from low-income families deserved assistance. Despite efforts to introduce concepts of child poverty and advocate for child grants, the child rights discourse coalition wielded limited influence in poverty reduction discussions. Second, the dominance of the social investment paradigm created convergence around the idea that children deserved assistance, influencing how both national and sub-national governments approached child-focused programs. Even when sub-national governments adopted child grants, they adapted these programs to align with social investment objectives, such as health outcomes, diverging from UNICEF's advocated model of child grants based on a human rights and child rights perspective. Third, Indonesia's

sociocultural values aligned more naturally with CCT's approach than with universal child grants. The CCT model resonated with existing Islamic concepts of *fakir miskin* and care for orphans, while emphasising citizens' obligations rather than rights in social protection.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has examined how two global policy models targeting children, conditional cash transfer and child grants, are being adopted and institutionalised in Indonesia. This chapter argued that the prevalent notions of deserving poor children made the institutionalisation of the CCT model in PKH at the national level more successful than the child-grant model at the sub-national level. The success of CCT is attributed to the convergence between the social investment paradigm promoted by policy actors at the national level, which I classified as the "economic development" discourse coalition, and Indonesia's sociocultural values that shape notions of deserving poor. Conversely, the alternative idea of deserving children based on the rights-based approach in child grants did not align with existing sociocultural values that emphasised citizens' obligations over their rights and the concept of *"fakir miskin",* which justified the residual approach in social assistance. While contributing to the social investment hegemony, the child's rights discourse coalition struggled to fit the idea with the existing poverty discourse.

This chapter begins by examining the historical context of existing notions of children as orphans, exploring how historical, religious, and economic factors shaped these concepts before Indonesia introduced a social protection system. Post-colonial legacy, the Islamic religious obligations of providing *Zakat* for the *fakir miskin*, as well as poverty, have led to the proliferation of *panti* (orphanages) in Indonesia during the New Order regime. Major crises, including the 1998 AFC and the Aceh Tsunami, reinforced this institutional welfare approach through state channelling support through *panti* rather than directly to households. However, research revealed that many children in these institutions had living parents who were driven by economic hardship to seek institutional care. As a result, international organisations, such as the "child's rights" policy coalition, began advocating for the government to adopt a deinstitutionalisation policy. This reform agenda gained momentum as it aligned with two government priorities: reducing the budget on institutional care and redirecting government support to poor families through household-based social assistance.

Indonesia's new notions of deserving poor children emerged as the Indonesian government adopted CCT and introduced the PKH program in 2007. The failure of the Indonesian government's first cash-transfer program, BLT, in 2005-2006 provided a policy window for policy entrepreneurs at the World Bank to introduce the idea. The World Bank representative

engaged with key officials from national agencies, such as Bappenas and TNP2K, who share the same ideological principles regarding the investment in human capital agenda and a residual approach to social assistance. It organised an "economic development" discourse coalition that formulated Indonesia's poverty reduction strategy, including household social assistance programs. The Indonesian government further scaled up the PKH program, especially under the populist Jokowi administration, strengthening the notion of deserving poor children. The "economic development" discourse coalition started to doubt the effectiveness of PKH. This new notion of deserving poor children has unintended consequences, including exclusion, where vulnerable children get left behind, and the issue of exclusion error, where there is a discrepancy between the idea of deserving children based on state and citizen definitions. Further, the notions of deserving poor children also led to practices of finding the 'undeserving' poor families, including the use of shaming and labelling.

Different ideas of deserving children emerged as UNICEF introduced the idea of a "child grant" based on human rights and children's rights principles. The policy model was originally introduced as universal or non-poverty-targeted and unconditional, based on the principles. The key social protection policy actors at the national level did not buy into the idea of the child grant. Despite the national government rejecting the child grant model, Papua Province and Sabang City sub-national governments adopted the child grant policy model. Local government officials, acting as local policy entrepreneurs, aligned child grants with the political and institutional interests at the regional level. In Papua Province, officials realigned the child grant program with the provincial government's focus on improving the human development outcomes of Indigenous Papuan children. Meanwhile, the Sabang City government aligned the child grant initiative with a stunting reduction strategy. However, various institutional challenges and local political dynamics made the idea of child grants less sustainable.

This chapter highlights the intricate interplay between sociocultural values and the roles of discourse coalitions and political agendas in shaping Indonesia's social assistance programs for children. To have more inclusive social assistance programs for children in Indonesia, there needs to be a shift in the social protection paradigm that views children in terms of what they can contribute to the state, and a more child-sensitive social protection program that recognises the different situations and vulnerabilities of children in Indonesia.

The next chapter explores similar sociocultural values, such as religious norms, that shape deservingness among women and create patterns of inclusion and exclusion in social assistance programs.

Chapter Five: Gender Norms, Women and Exclusion in Social Protection Policy

5.1 Introduction

Throughout my fieldwork across various districts in Bintan, Aceh, and Badung, I met women who worked in precarious jobs or were part of the informal sector. Work in the informal sector encompasses self-employment, home-based, casual, or family work that is often unpaid (Schaner & Das, 2016). Those who work in the informal sector include the social assistance recipients. For example, in a rural village in Aceh Jaya, I met a group of women who are PKH recipients, and their livelihood is based on collecting clams from the nearby river, as they have no access to land. In more urban areas, such as the Bintan and Badung districts, women receiving PKH engage in various livelihood activities, including petty trading and part-time household assistance.

This chapter examines the contested nature of deservingness and the paradox observed in social protection policies in Indonesia and globally. While the “entitlement revolution” in the Global South has increased women’s access to social assistance, studies show that women remain more vulnerable than men to falling into poverty (Staab et al., 2024). In this chapter, I analyse how gender norms influence ideas of deservingness that, in turn, shape the patterns of inclusion and exclusion in social assistance programs for women. Specifically, I examine how particular constructs of deservingness have made women deserving of social assistance as mothers while excluding them by design in their role as informal sector workers. Indonesia's Bureau of Statistics defines an “informal sector worker” as those working in the informal economy, including "own-account workers, temporary or casual employees and unpaid family workers" (Statistics Indonesia, 2024).

This chapter argues that Indonesia's social assistance programs primarily target women living in poverty in their reproductive roles while overlooking their productive role in supporting families through informal work. When the State recognised women's economic role, primarily through providing access to microfinance programs, it created a notion of deserving women as "entrepreneurs". As we will see, this construct of deservingness perpetuates women's position in the informal sector, leaving many women excluded by design from social protection and subject to market forces.

This chapter is structured as follows: First, I examine the evolution of Indonesia's social assistance programs and how they construct women across different social assistance

programs, with a broader definition of social assistance that includes microfinance programs. Second, I examine how Indonesian women in the informal sector lack entitlements and use stories from the field to illustrate how many women in this sector are intentionally excluded from social assistance. Lastly, I discuss how Indonesia's dominant gender ideology, conservative religious values, and neoliberal ideas reinforced through women's economic empowerment and dominant view of poverty create a particular construct of deservingness that prioritises women's reproductive roles over their productive ones.

5.2 How women have been constructed in Indonesia's social assistance programs?

In this section, I analyse the evolution of social assistance programs and how policy constructs women's roles. I problematise how the government constructed women in social assistance policy, from being invisible in early social assistance programs in the early 2000s to becoming the primary recipient of social assistance programs in CCT and micro-finance programs.

5.2.1 Women were invisible in the early social assistance programs: Raskin and BLT

When Indonesia first introduced social assistance programs in the early 2000s, it overlooked women as recipients in their own right. As previous chapters have discussed, the earliest social assistance programs introduced as a social safety net made 'poor households' deserving of social assistance because they were affected mainly by the global crisis and bore the consequences of the Indonesian government's policies. The Indonesian government first introduced the Raskin, or Rice for the Poor, as a rice subsidy program in response to the Asian Financial Crisis that began in 1998 (Kwon & Kim, 2015; Sumarto, 2017). Around 2005, the government introduced the first temporary unconditional cash transfer, BLT, as part of its policy to remove fuel subsidies (Kwon & Kim, 2015). Both programs targeted "poor households" affected by the economic crisis and policy changes, but crucially, the government designated men as primary recipients based on their status as heads of households.

Internal policy debates reveal how gender norms shape program design. A senior Bappenas official recalled the institutional resistance to targeting women.

> I remember the debates between us (Bappenas) and the Vice President's Office. The Vice-President Secretariat wanted to give it to the head of the household, the men, but not the women (Mothers). Vice Presidents used their power. Only when we design PKH can we give it to Ibu (mothers/women).[59]

[59] Interview with NG9, 19 January 2022.

The statement above suggested that policymakers at that time made the decisions based on gender norms that cast men as primary breadwinners, ignoring the economic realities of poor households where both men and women contribute to daily survival. This gender-blind approach particularly disadvantaged women-headed households, who faced heightened vulnerability. Studies by Schaner (2012) examining the gendered impacts of early social assistance programs showed how women-headed households were more likely to rely on outside assistance, including family and government social assistance. "Female-headed households are not more likely to fall below the poverty line than male-headed households, but are more vulnerable to poverty" (Schaner, 2012, p.6). The study also found that divorced and widowed women, especially in rural areas, have the greatest poverty burden.

The program's design created additional barriers for women-headed households through documentation requirements. Access to social assistance depended on possessing a Family Card (*Kartu Keluarga* or KK). However, women-headed households often lacked access to social assistance due to the lack of legal status in their marriage. One study found that women in Indonesia who are in "informal marriage" or de facto marriage have no legal documents, including KK, and cannot access household social assistance (World Bank, 2020). One of my research respondents, a senior executive from PEKKA[60], working with rural women-headed households, highlighted this systematic exclusion:

> If a social assistance program requires an individual to be part of a household to receive the program, many PEKKA members will become ineligible. Especially, the program targets the head of households and requires a marriage certificate. The exclusion error can reach up to 50%.[61]

Secondly, beyond the issue of access, Raskin's program design overlooked women's instrumental role in household food security, resulting in unintended consequences. While women could collect Raskin on behalf of their husbands, the program helped meet family food needs, but the design increased women's time burden (Arif et al., 2010). For example, the requirement to line up during rice distribution, intended to discourage non-poor households, disproportionately affected women. As a female, TNP2K official reflected on Raskin's implementation in the early days:

> I criticised the Raskin approach because recipients had to line up to avoid the mistargeting. (The assumption is) Those who are not poor will not line up. They

[60] PEKKA (*Perempuan Kepala Keluarga* or Women Headed Households) is a grassroots national women's NGO, with the main constituency being women heads of households. In 2022, they operated in 27 Provinces and had around 25,000 members. The government also use the term "Pekka" to refer to female-headed households

[61] Interview with NGO1, 9 June 2022.

> (recipients) have to line up in hot weather. They were primarily women who were lining up.[62]

Lastly, these early programs also ignored the gender dynamics within the households and the different needs of vulnerable household members, such as children or pregnant mothers. Policymakers designed social assistance programs to assume that household benefits would be distributed equally among households. Arif et al.'s (2010) study revealed how the assumption of equal household distribution of the 15kg rice allocation overlooked intra-household consumption patterns and specific nutritional needs of pregnant women and young children. The study found that household rice consumption patterns often disadvantaged women, highlighting how gender-blind program design can reinforce existing inequalities.

The gender-blind approach of early social assistance programs and their negative consequences for women prompted a significant policy shift in the late 2000s. Learning from the limitations of Raskin and BLT, policymakers began to target women explicitly in social assistance schemes in CCT. However, this inclusion of women came with its own set of assumptions about gender roles and responsibilities, leading to new forms of gendered program design that would shape social assistance for years to come.

5.2.2 Women as mothers and household managers: PKH and BPNT

> We learned from the BLT study that men, as the head of the household, used the money to buy phone credit or cigarettes; we introduced CCT in 2007, conditional ones because we learned from BLT that the recipients should not be men but women."[63]

The introduction of CCT programs in 2007, notably the Family Hope Program (or Program Keluarga Harapan, PKH) and the later transformation of food assistance into the Sembako program in 2017, marked significant shifts in how women were perceived in social assistance programs. Under these programs, women from low-income households became eligible for assistance primarily in their capacity as mothers and household managers. As we saw in Chapter Four, PKH mainly targets children in poor families, as the benefit level is based on the number of children and pregnant mothers in the household. However, women are the primary conduits for program benefits on behalf of their children and families.

Similarly, the government transformed Indonesia's food assistance from an in-kind transfer, the Rice for the Poor (Raskin) program, into an electronic voucher, the Non-Cash Food

[62] Interview with NG1, 20 November 2021.
[63] Interview with NG3, 16 June 2022.

Assistance (BPNT), in 2017, increasingly targeting women as primary recipients. The 2020 Sembako Program Technical Guideline clarifies:

> The primary beneficiary of the Sembako program is a family unit. However, to distribute the benefit, there needs to be one name in the KPM (Family Beneficiary) as the KPM administrator, who will be the main owner of the bank account to receive the food assistance. The KPM administrator would be decided based on the following priority: 1) Priority is given to the women in the family, whether as the main household head or as the partner of the household head (page 2).

This statement from the guideline further reflects how the State constructs women in social assistance policy as the administrators of their families. One study found that 98% of BPNT recipients were women, including 16% of female household heads (Panggabean et al., 2019). Like PKH, the Sembako program considered women "deserving" of social assistance as members of poor households and as the "administrators" of the family.

This policy shift presents a double-edged sword for women's empowerment. While PKH and Sembako programs moved away from targeting men as household heads, they constructed women's deservingness narrowly through their reproductive and domestic roles. There are several issues with this narrow conception of women as deserving in their reproductive role. First, Indonesian government officials target women not based on women's vulnerabilities but on assumptions about their effectiveness in using benefits for family welfare. As one senior Bappenas official explained:

> We give it to the women because, based on our experience, it is more effective when we provide programs to women. We want to ensure that the assistance contributes to the family.[64]

This instrumentalist approach to women's inclusion aligns with what Molyneux (2007) described as women (as mothers) "in the service of the state" to achieve developmental objectives (Molyneux, 2007). Maxine Molyneux's analysis of Mexico's conditional cash transfer, Progresa, which was later adopted in developing countries, including Indonesia, highlights how CCTs formalise maternal responsibilities, with "the state playing an active role in re-rationalising gender roles and identities" (2006, p. 440). While acknowledging women's needs, these programs reinforce their traditional roles as wives and mothers.

The second issue of this narrow conception of women is that programs like PKH, with their conditionalities, add more responsibilities to poor women's lives. Women living in poverty already have the double burden of carrying the reproductive role as mothers and caregivers

[64] Interview with NG13, 8 June 2022.

for the family and the productive role as income earners for the family. However, the program design appears to overlook the double burden that women carry by assigning additional responsibilities to meet the program objectives. The approach of CCT, while having the potential to give women social status and self-respect by having access to cash assistance, has limited effect in securing a more sustainable livelihood and risks women remaining in poverty. (Molyneux, 2006).

Following the CCT prescription, PKH has a capacity-building component called 'Family Development Session' (FDS), where PKH mothers must attend monthly training sessions as part of the program's conditionalities. Based on a World Bank document, "For the FDS, PKH beneficiary families, represented by the mothers or adult women in the families (PKH caretakers), are grouped between 25–40 people usually by village or hamlet" (Syamsulhakim & Khadijah, 2021). PKH facilitators would deliver different modules, including Children's Education and Parenting, Health and Nutrition, Financial Management and Business Planning, Child Protection, and Social Welfare. While it is called a 'family development session', only the women, who are primary PKH recipients, not the men, must attend.

Several Indonesian government officials who were part of the team that designed the PKH firmly believe that the FDS session's objective is to empower women recipients of PKH, particularly in their roles as better mothers, parents, and managers of their respective families. When I discussed gender equality and social assistance, senior officials in BAPPENAS, who designed PKH, told me about the objective of FDS sessions:

> How can they be great mothers and motivate their children to attend school? To change their mindset so that they (the children) do not only work in the kitchen. That is in parenting education (module). The family economy (module) ensures how to manage their finances. Also, for child protection, they should not pinch or slap their children.[65]

This paternalistic narrative from state officials acknowledges that some women play economic roles that make them unable to meet responsibilities to attend FDS sessions. However, the PKH program logic is still based on the care and reproductive role that needs to be played by women. As the Bappenas official explained: “If the mother is not around in a case where she became a migrant worker, other caregivers in the family, like the aunt or grandmother, can attend the session.”[66]

[65] Interview with NG03, 16 June 2022.
[66] Interview with NG03, 16 June 2022.

When I asked this official about the father's role in CCT, she noted that the father's role is to “make a living” *(cari nafkah),* thus reinforcing gender ideologies. Most PKH recipients are also trying to make a living through the precarious jobs they hold, which I discuss in the next section. Molyneux (2006) made a similar observation about the women recipients of CCT in Latin America who had to engage in income-generating activities for household survival. However, these activities were precarious and poorly remunerated. PKH facilitators in the Badung district observe that most recipients are officially categorised as “housewives”. These women typically maintain *a “usaha sampingan” (a small side* business) to meet their family's daily needs, usually in the informal sector.[67]

Thirdly, when the PKH program recognises women's economic role in the family, PKH perceives women's livelihood as "small business owners". As suggested in the FDS module on “financial management and business planning”, the PKH program encourages women to have a small business to get additional income. Eventually, they can “graduate” from the program. Graduation is a concept in the social protection discourse, especially linked with CCT, where people can move off social protection in "more productive and resilient livelihoods" (Sabates-Wheeler & Devereux, 2013).

During discussions with PKH facilitators in Badung and Bintan, I found that they tend to focus on getting PKH recipients to “graduate” or voluntarily opt out of the program as they become financially independent without its support. A standard narrative shared in the FGD is the precarious work undertaken by women recipients. The PKH facilitators shared "success stories" of women who have a small shop or are petty traders, eventually graduating. However, they also informed me about the livelihoods of PKH recipients, such as buruh (daily labourers) or those who work for an employer. One of the PKH facilitators in Badung narrated a graduation story from a PKH recipient:

> From 2018 to 2019, with the PKH's assistance, the business may not have been that large. As a housewife, she started to have additional income. Some are willing to graduate (from PKH) because they can already meet their daily needs, but we need to encourage them. If we do not encourage or educate them, they will be willing to keep receiving (the PKH program) because now they are better off and can meet their daily needs and graduate from the program. We must educate them that they can and are willing to do so, but it is hard to find.[68]

[67] FGD with former PKH Technical Team in MOSA PI2, 8 June 2022
[68] FGD with PKH Facilitators in Badung District, PI12, June 2022.

The above statement illustrates the efforts made by PKH facilitators to motivate women to start small businesses when they have sufficient income to meet their daily needs with the training provided through the FDS.

The concept of the “graduation” approach appears particularly unrealistic given the complex challenges women face. In Aceh Jaya, the women PKH recipients I met were collecting clams from the river for survival, lacking access to traditional agricultural land. Among the PKH recipients that I met in Aceh Jaya, one woman was the primary breadwinner because her husband had a disability and was no longer able to work. For these PKH recipient women, I could not see how they could fulfil the government and facilitators' expectations of being able to "graduate" from the PKH program without other state interventions that would give them more options for their livelihood.

However, studies show that graduation expectations in PKH are often unrealistic, as they do not address the structural drivers of poverty. A World Bank study found that only 26.7% of PKH graduates were voluntary, termed “prosperous-independent" graduates. The remaining PKH recipients who "graduate" were those who no longer met the program's eligibility criteria, such as when the children were no longer of school age (Syamsulhakim & Khadijah, 2021). Furthermore, among those who voluntarily graduate, the heads of households are predominantly male (94.5%), while only 5.5% are female-headed (ibid.). Furthermore, the study also found that there are no standard guidelines or criteria for PKH recipients to graduate based on the judgment of PKH facilitators (Syamsulhakim & Khadijah, 2021).

A study on PKH families' livelihood highlighted how livelihood interventions that target women recipients of PKH may not be suitable because women are burdened with additional care duties. (MAHKOTA & SMERU, 2020). This study also found that only 30% of women within the PKH families engaged in wage employment because they needed a livelihood that provided flexible working arrangements to juggle their responsibilities as mothers and primary caregivers for their families. At the same time, most employers in Indonesia do not offer flexible working arrangements (ibid). Despite the unrealistic expectations placed on women to lift their families out of poverty, many of the issues that poor families face are beyond household control, such as market-specific constraints or environment-specific constraints (Sabates-Wheeler & Devereux, 2013), which will be discussed further in the last section of this chapter.

In conclusion, while the PKH and Sembako programs have shifted the focus of social assistance to women, they have done so in a way that reinforces traditional gender roles and overlooks the complex realities of women's lives. By constructing women as deserving

primarily in their roles as mothers and household managers, these programs fail to recognise women's broader economic contributions, particularly in the informal sector. This narrow conception of deservingness adds to women's already significant burdens, including time poverty, and fails to address their underlying precarity. The program's emphasis on women as conduits for family welfare, while well-intentioned, ultimately limits their transformative potential and may inadvertently perpetuate gender inequalities. In the next section, I will discuss another narrow conception of women in their economic role reflected in the government's emphasis on targeting women in Indonesia's microfinance programs.

5.2.3 Women as "small-business owners": micro-finance programs

In this section, I will discuss how the Indonesian government began to recognise women's productive or economic role, albeit with a narrow conception of women as "small business owners" or "entrepreneurs". Since 2015, the Indonesian government has started targeting women through economic empowerment programs, primarily focusing on micro-small-medium enterprises (MSMEs). While these programs in Table 5.1 do not fit the standard definition of social protection or social assistance, the Indonesian national government often classified micro-finance programs targeted at small businesses as part of the government's 'social protection' efforts. As the Indonesian Ministry of Finance, Sri Mulyani Indrawati, suggests in her book chapter, on the progress of gender equality in Indonesia since democratisation:

> In addition to conditional cash transfer, the government provides economic empowerment through several programs targeting small and micro businesses. As women own many micro and small businesses, these programs have direct gender equality implications. (Indrawati, 2023, p.102)

Table 5.1: Government Microfinance Programs

Programs	Total coverage	Gender Targeting
Ultra Micro Credit (UMi)	5.38 million micro, small and medium enterprises	Not specifically targeted at women, though the government claims 95% of beneficiaries are women-owned MSMEs
Membina Ekonomi Keluarga Sejahtera (Mekaar) Empowering Household Economy Program	11.1 million women	Specifically, it targets underprivileged women starting or developing micro businesses.

Source: Indrawati 2023

First, the Indonesian government introduced the Mekaar program in 2015, a community-based credit program targeted towards impoverished women. The program followed the Grameen Bank model, including group lending, loans, savings, and empowerment programs. (Sunarso, 2024). Unlike other social assistance programs distributed by a government agency, such as the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Mekaar program is under Indonesia's state-owned enterprise,

PT PNM. In 2024, the Indonesian government claimed 15.2 million active clients (Kementerian Sekretariat Negara, 2024)

On the government's official website, the President often addresses the women or the *"ibu-ibu*" recipients of the Mekaar program. On the government's official website, President Jokowi made the following comments.

> My parents are also like the *Ibu-Ibu* (women) in front of me, but again, because of the discipline of saving, this is very important in my parents' small business, which sells bamboo and wood. Save, save, save, and remain disciplined in your saving. It is crucial, and the savings are essential for sending children to school. *Insha Allah*, if the mother here has discipline, the children can be like me, a future Minister or President. (Sekretariat Kabinet Republik Indonesia, 2019)

The above government statement reflects President Jokowi's support towards these types of women's economic empowerment programs. As a populist leader, he tried to show the people, especially the “poor,” how he came from a humble beginning just like them. By saving and using the government’s money as capital for their small businesses, the poor could succeed just like him. President Jokowi sees women's potential to contribute to their families, especially their children, supporting the broader government's human development or social investment agenda, as discussed in Chapter Four.

Secondly, another program that targets MSMEs but not specifically women is UMi. However, the government claims that this program benefits women, as 2018 data indicate that women own 64.5% of the 37 million MSMEs in Indonesia. The government introduced UMi in 2017 as a low-cost micro-credit option targeting small businesses with no assets for collateral and a more streamlined procedure (Adam et al., 2021). Furthermore, the government considered UMi as "advanced-stage social protection" to enhance the economic capacity of the poor and vulnerable, particularly those who own and operate a business (Adam et al., 2021). Hence, the government introduced UMI in 2107 as a cheap micro-credit targeting small businesses with a more straightforward procedure compared to KUR.

Third, the Indonesian government began to focus on women's economic empowerment programs in the 2000s as part of a broader community development initiative, rather than as an individual entitlement. Indonesia's *Program Nasional Pemberdayaan Masyarakat (PNPM*), or the community-driven development program, had a component known as a "block grant," where women needed to form a group based on their livelihood to access these grants. A study noted that the PNPM made a contribution to Indonesia's gender equality agenda, as the program incorporated gender-based affirmative action strategies into its design. Although

PNPM has been applauded as a program that meets the "practical needs of women" or improves their participation, most studies have found that the program was not yet intentionally designed to address or change unequal gender relations in the community. (Syukri, 2021).

While PNPM has no longer been an Indonesian government program since President Jokowi's administration in 2014, as he replaced it with a new "Village Fund" program, PNPM was one of Indonesia's most extensive poverty reduction programs that came up in my discussions with the national state officials, especially when I asked about social assistance programs that target women.

A Bappenas official in charge of the gender equality portfolio narrated how the women empowerment program began in Indonesia, drawing from her experience when she was in the poverty reduction directorate and involved with the PNPM program:

> My ten years of experience managing the PNPM program demonstrated how empowering women positively impacts the women's groups formed through PNPM. It ensures that the program objectives are being met.[69]

Similarly, during my FGD with PEKKA members in Aceh Besar, the women, who were mostly farm labourers, received community grant assistance for farmers, which they used to buy fertiliser. Based on their observation, women's groups are usually more successful than men's.[70]

The national government supports and recognises women's productive role, but with a narrow conception of women as small business owners. The programs assume that those with a small business can be flexible and continue their domestic role. As the Bappenas Director in charge of women's issues, explained

> We also have assistance for their business capital, which is an individual entitlement. Ultimately, it is about improving the family's economic condition and enhancing their ability to run small businesses effectively. Nevertheless, we are going in that direction, and we do not only have a family-based approach. However, we hope that they (the women) will form a group so that it will be easier for “Ibu-ibu” perempuan (women) to express their views. Their negotiation will be more successful…That is what we (the government) are trying to push. However, it is still not enough. When we assist women with capital, there needs to be a supportive environment (for women’s economic participation) and the husband must agree for the wife to work, understanding that when

[69] Interview NG13, 8 June 2022.
[70] FGD2, 28 July 2022

> women work for economic reasons, this does not mean they are neglecting their domestic responsibilities.[71]

The government's solution to the gender equality agenda is that women need access to capital to expand their businesses. If they are successful in a micro-small-medium enterprise, they can support themselves. However, the government pushes women to be entrepreneurial but lacks focus on ensuring their access to social protection. Syukri (2021) argued that Indonesia's community development program was more interested in improving the practical needs of women but avoided dealing with the gender-strategic needs for effective programming, which is the unequal power relations between men and women in the village. As an example, while there are rules that ensure women's participation in village governance, most strategic decisions in the community are made by men (Syukri, 2021).

Many government programs aim to train women in skills development and income generation through initiatives like Mekaar. An Acehnese academic specialising in gender relations and women's issues in Aceh offered this critical observation:

> The women's economic programs lack effectiveness and sustainability in improving welfare conditions. They remain fragmented. While women receive skills training, they lack access to markets and capital. A fundamental issue is that women are considered unbankable.[72]

She further emphasised how structural issues in Aceh province, particularly limited private-sector options, create interconnected challenges that confine women to informal sector work. This observation aligns with broader research on women's micro-enterprise programs in Indonesia. Studies of initiatives like the PNPM grant reveal that women often become "entrepreneurs" out of necessity rather than choice, typically operating in less productive business sectors (Arsana & Alibhai, 2016).

Moreover, women tend to prioritise household needs with the money they make through their small businesses, such as child care, healthcare, or emergencies, instead of using the capital to grow their businesses. As Arsana and Alibhai (2016, p.7) noted: "Providing loans to women entrepreneurs without changing the family's economy is destined to produce sub-optimal results." This suggests that adequate support for women entrepreneurs must go beyond mere financial need to include financial literacy, market access, and more comprehensive social protection coverage.

[71] Interview with NG13, 8 June 2022.
[72] Interview with RAT10, 1 August 2022.

The Indonesian government maintains an overly simplistic view that providing women with capital or micro-credit will automatically improve their economic situation and their families' welfare. This approach overlooks gender dimensions in the household and the critical need for comprehensive social protection. Women who own small micro-credit businesses can be considered informal workers and face a significant gap in accessing social insurance (BPJS Ketenagakerjaan).

This section has examined how social assistance and poverty reduction programs target women in Indonesia. From early programs that recognised only men as household heads, to CCT programs making women eligible as mothers and caregivers, to micro-finance initiatives viewing women as small business owners, the conception of "deserving women" has evolved but remained narrow. This constrained conception of deservingness creates particular challenges for the majority of Indonesian women, particularly those who live in poverty, who must navigate both productive and reproductive roles in the informal sector.

5.3 Women in the informal sector: exclusion from social assistance programs

> Informal workers, particularly the self-employed, face either de jure or de facto exclusion from employment-based social protection schemes, which largely rely on the presence of an employment relationship. They are also often excluded as direct recipients of social assistance, which is aimed at those outside of the labour market, such as children and older people. (Alfers & Moussié, 2022, p.107)

A social protection gap for informal workers persists across the Global South (Alfers & Moussié, 2022). This section examines what constitutes the informal sector in Indonesia and illustrates how women are excluded from social assistance, particularly in their productive roles as informal sector workers. In Indonesia, the informal sector's share steadily declined from 2006 to 2016, from 68.9% to 57.6% (Statistics Indonesia (BPS), 2024). Other research indicates that informal workers still comprise 75% of total employment in the country, one of the highest rates in Southeast Asia, exceeding those of Thailand, Vietnam, and Myanmar. (Wihardja & Cunningham, 2021, p.6).

Despite comprising a large proportion of the population, existing reviews of Indonesia's social protection system have highlighted that informal sector workers lack entitlements to both contributory social insurance and non-contributory social assistance (OECD, 2019; The World Bank, 2020). Often referred to as the "missing middle," informal workers are unable or unwilling to contribute to social insurance and are ineligible for social assistance (OECD, 2019). Indonesia's contributory social insurance is primarily geared towards those who work in the government, formal, and private sectors. For example, Indonesia's labour social security programs or BPJS Ketenagakerjaan (BPJS Employment) cover work accident (JKK), death

insurance (JKM), pension insurance (JP), old age insurance (JHT) and job loss insurance (JKP). Informal workers can only access JKK, JKM and JHT (Setyonaluri & Milawati, 2023). Furthermore, from a gender perspective, female participation in BPJS Ketenagakerjaan reveals that fewer than 30% of women are registered as participants in BPJS Ketenagakerjaan. (Setyonaluri & Milawati, 2023). Indonesia's informal sector workers are unlikely to enrol because of their unregistered and irregular income (Murphy, 2019).

While both men and women in the informal sector miss out on accessing social protection, women in the informal sector are more vulnerable in several aspects. Firstly, women in the informal sector face a higher likelihood of being in poverty compared to men across various age groups, and these gendered inequalities tend to accumulate throughout their life course (OECD, 2019). Women and women-headed households are also more prone to being poor. Studies have found that female-headed households rely mainly on government or family assistance as these households have 'substantially lower earned income' (Schaner, 2012, p.4). Similarly, a more recent study conducted during the COVID-19 crisis found that women and female-headed households are disproportionately affected because they are more reliant on transfers from remittances, which declined during the pandemic (World Bank, 2020). Further, female-headed households are more at risk of experiencing food insecurity (ibid.)

Secondly, the lack of social protection for informal sector workers disproportionately affects women, as 60% of women work in Indonesia in the informal sector (The World Bank, 2020). Most women working informally are “self-employed, home-based, casual or family workers”, often unpaid (The World Bank, 2020, p.21). Furthermore, those considered informal sector workers are also often MSME owners (micro, small, and medium enterprises), with 64.5% being women (Susanti et al., 2023). As discussed in the previous section, the Indonesian government has increasingly acknowledged the role of women as MSME owners. However, the schemes often focus on women expanding their small businesses without considering the precarious financial situation of small business owners, who typically have unstable incomes, especially when it comes to accessing social protection.

Lastly, working primarily in the informal sector has long-term consequences, which are further exacerbated by the longer life expectancy of women compared to men. Women tend to be more vulnerable in their old age as they do not have contributory social insurance, where they can access old-age savings. While having no access to social insurance or social assistance affects both older women and men, 53% of Indonesia's population aged 65 and over are women (TNP2K, 2018). Further, women are 14% more likely to be extremely poor and widowed (56% compared to men 14%), and 15% of women live alone compared to 5% of men

(TNP2K, 2018). In terms of informal workers, 89.1% of elderly women compared to 81.4% of men are informal workers (TNP2K and SMERU, 2020), and women are "..more likely to work informally and to be informally employed the older they are" (OECD, 2019, p.115). The high number of older people still working in the informal sector can also indicate that they do not have a choice but to work because they cannot rely on the government or family assistance. In the next section, I will discuss various situations involving women in the informal sector and their lack of access to social assistance programs.

5.3.1 Women and COVID19 social assistance programs

The COVID-19 pandemic response particularly highlighted how women in the informal sector are systematically excluded from social assistance in Indonesia. A representative from KAPAL Perempuan, a women's civil society organisation working with rural women living in poverty, highlighted how various categories of informal workers remain effectively invisible to social protection programs. She explained:

> Informal workers in Indonesia practically do not receive social assistance. Informal labourers, domestic workers, commercial sex workers, women engaged in unrecognised work, micro, small, and medium enterprises (UMKM), home workers, and street vendors—all fall outside the definition of formal workers. Despite their work, they often go unrecognised and lack social assistance. [73]

One of the mechanisms the government used to respond to existing COVID-19 assistance was to utilise existing household social assistance programs, such as PKH and Kartu Sembako. However, pre-existing exclusion issues in these programs meant many vulnerable women remained unable to access support. This was particularly problematic given research showing women's greater reliance on social assistance during crises (Schaner, 2012; World Bank, 2020a).

The government also introduced new programs for COVID-19 that further reinforced gender disparities by focusing on formal sector workers. "The gender perspective is very weak towards informal workers: for example, in the most recent pandemic, the Wage Subsidy Assistance (or Bantuan Upah), where each formal worker receives one million rupiah per month, excludes informal workers."[74] As the majority of informal sector workers are women.

[73] Interview NGO2, 13 June 2022
[74] Interview NGO2, 13 June 2022

The situation was particularly acute for women migrant workers, who faced multiple barriers to accessing support. As the KAPAL Perempuan executive further explained:

> The same goes for migrant workers; 85% of migrants (actually 90%) are highly vulnerable and are repatriated, such as domestic workers. They are unable to access anything, including the wage subsidies, requirements for micro, small, and medium enterprise aid, and the Pre-Employment Card program, which is not user-friendly for those unfamiliar with electronics, as it lacks smartphones with good signals and sufficient data.[75]

Even when the government specifically tries to reach those in the informal sector, women still lack access to these types of assistance. The government introduced the Bantuan Produktif (Productive Assistance), targeting micro, small, and medium enterprises. However, women were not explicitly targeted (Salyanti & Askar, 2022). A study found that women had significantly less access to these programs despite their greater reliance on social assistance during crises (Salyanti & Askar, 2022).

Among COVID-19 assistance programs, only BLT Dana Desa (Village Fund Cash Transfer) explicitly prioritised women-headed households through its community-based targeting approach. Unlike a centrally managed program, BLT Dana Desa empowered village authorities to select recipients through participatory mechanisms, working within broad criteria set by the Ministry of Village. This decentralised approach enabled greater responsiveness to local needs and circumstances.

The Minister for Villages noted that in 2022, many of the 6.38 million program recipients were "women-headed households" (BLT Dana Desa 2022 Telah Disalurkan Kepada 6,38 Juta KPM, PEKKA Mendominasi - Updesa, 2022). This includes five Indonesian provinces: Banten, West Sumatra, East Java, West Nusa Tenggara and West Java, where more than 50% of recipients are women-headed households. However, very few studies to date can verify the Minister's claim, especially if there is no gender-disaggregated data in the region, and data on women household heads is also not being collected by the government.

The implementation of BLT Desa stands out from existing social assistance programs due to its community-targeting approach, which enables greater participation of members of women CSOs in recipient selection.[76] Existing social assistance programs rely on Indonesia's centralised poverty database (DTKS) and cannot be updated at the village level. As discussed in the previous chapter, there is an inherent exclusion error problem or an inaccuracy issue in

[75] Interview NGO2, 13 June 2022
[76] Interview with NGO1 9 June 2022, NGO 2 – 13 June 2022.

Indonesia's poverty database (Research Unit - TNP2K Secretariat, 2020; World Bank, 2022). Further, the poverty database, by design, only consists of households whose income is in the bottom 40% of the population. Hence, those above the 40% threshold are not in the database.

These findings show that women in the informal sector lack recognition from the State, especially during the COVID-19 crisis, where social assistance for women in the informal sector was limited. This is despite women playing a significant role in livelihood creation, especially during COVID-19. A quantitative analysis (Halim et al., 2023) found that during the COVID-19 crisis, women were less likely to be unemployed. This includes an increase in employment for less-educated women in rural areas who were working as casual workers or unpaid family workers in the agriculture sector. This suggests that women tended to take up jobs to cope with the economic effects created during COVID-19 (Halim et al., 2023)

5.3.2 Women's role in household livelihood: stories from women fishermen

Women's critical contributions to Indonesia's informal sector, particularly family-based livelihoods, remain largely invisible in social protection. The case of female fishermen *(nelayan perempuan*) clearly illustrates this invisibility. Although women comprise 42% of Indonesia's fisheries industry workforce (Napitupulu & Tanaya, 2020), they receive minimal recognition in government support programs. While men dominate high-value activities like fish harvesting, transportation, and distribution, women perform crucial but undervalued tasks such as grading, sorting, and market sales (Napitupulu & Tanaya, 2020). Even as government and NGO programs aim to increase women's participation in fisheries, they rarely address the specific needs of women fishermen who are integral to family fishing enterprises.

Administrative barriers systematically exclude women fishermen from accessing crucial government support programs, as revealed through the KUSUKA card program. A senior activist from CSO Kapal Perempuan Executive highlighted how seemingly technical requirements create significant gender-based exclusion. The primary barrier lies in identity documentation: women fishermen cannot access the KUSUKA program because their national identity cards (KTP) list their occupation as "housewife" (*Ibu Rumah Tangga*) rather than "fishermen" (*nelayan*). As the KAPAL Perempuan executive explained:

> The female fishermen we worked with cannot access KUSUKA because of legal identity and data issues. In their national ID Card (Kartu Tanda Penduduk, KTP), their occupation is written as 'housewife', making them ineligible to receive the program. [77]

[77] Interview NGO2, 13 June 2022.

Advocacy efforts to address these systemic barriers have achieved minimal success, revealing deeply entrenched gender bias in Indonesia's bureaucratic and political systems. KAPAL Perempuan's advocacy through the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection during COVID-19 resulted in only four out of 160 women fishermen gaining access to KUSUKA.[78] Similarly, in Java, women fishermen faced a two-year struggle to obtain fishermen's insurance cards *(Asuransi Nelayan),* with nine months spent just changing their KTP from "housewife" to "fishermen" (Fajar, 2019). More troubling was the response from the Central Java parliament members, who laughed at these women and deemed their occupation "inappropriate" as being fishermen is considered to be a man's occupation and women should work at home (Fajar, 2019). This reveals how gender norms are so embedded that they affect policy implementation.

The disconnect between policy intention and implementation reveals how policymakers fail to recognise systemic gender discrimination. Rachel Sabates-Wheeler and Keetie Roelen (2011) argue that women's vulnerability often stems from "institutionalised disadvantage". While state and development programs appear to increase their attention to women, cultural norms and institutional biases continue to overlook women's vulnerabilities.

Institutional blindness is evident in policymakers' responses to gender issues and social protection. When confronted with evidence about women fishermen's exclusion from KUSUKA, a senior Bappenas official dismissed it as merely an implementation issue rather than discrimination. Similarly, when asked about gender equality in social protection, a senior TNP2K official claimed, "The condition of gender equality has improved; there are many programs and men and women have equal access."[79] This response reflects the deeply embedded gender-blind approaches within Indonesia's bureaucratic culture, where women's vulnerability remains marginalised.

These experiences demonstrate how seemingly gender-neutral policies mask deeply rooted discrimination in Indonesia's social protection system. Despite "equal access" claims, women face systematic barriers embedded within program criteria and administrative requirements. These barriers reflect and reinforce traditional social norms that view men as primary breadwinners while confining women to supporting roles as "housewives." This systemic exclusion reveals the State's failure to recognise women's essential contributions to the fisheries sector and particularly undermines women's economic contribution. The World

[78] Interview with NGO2, 13 June 2022.
[79] Interview NG 01, 28 April 2022.

Research Institution found that women provide 48% of household incomes in fishing communities (Napitupulu & Tanaya, 2020). Thus, social norms create exclusion by design, as women's productive roles challenge existing gender expectations in Indonesian society. To understand this systematic exclusion more deeply, we must examine the historical and ideological factors that have shaped these gender norms.

5.4 Unpacking the factors that led to a narrow idea of deserving women

This section discusses the factors contributing to the notions of deservingness. Why are women constructed are more deserving in their reproductive role than in their productive role as informal sector workers? Studies on labour participation in Indonesia tend to focus on how "gender norms" can contribute to the gender gap in women's labour participation as well as women being in low-paying jobs (Merdikawati & Dong, 2023; Schaner & Das, 2016). Nevertheless, as the previous sections in this chapter have discussed, these particular gender norms also underpin different social assistance policies targeting women, ignoring some of the diverse situations poor women in Indonesia are facing. The existing gender norms also reinforce women staying in the informal sector because they can juggle work and family care (Radhakrishnan, 2010). Three factors affect these gender norms and social assistance programs in Indonesia: State *Ibuism* ideology, the influence of a more conservative Islam in Indonesia and neoliberal ideas on poverty issues in Indonesia.

5.4.1 Dominant gender ideology: State Ibuism

First, Indonesia's gender ideology still dominates Indonesian policies, including in the discourse of deservingness in social assistance. This state gender ideology is what Suryakusuma called 'State *Ibuism*' or ‘State Motherism’ (Hyunanda et al., 2021; Suryakusuma, 1996). This gender ideology started during Suharto's New Order era, which positions women as dutiful wives and mothers and men as the head of the household. This ideology is also reflected in the 1974 Marriage Law, which labels men/husbands as the head of the household and women/wives as *Ibu Rumah Tangga* (housewife). Further, programs created during the New Order era, such as PKK (Family Welfare Association) and *Dharma Wanita* (Civil Servants' Wife Association), positioned women as homemakers supporting their husbands' jobs or positions (Robinson, 2023). Despite the regime's fall, institutions and the gender construct that emerged during the New Order era remain and continue to be reinforced through several social programs (Robinson, 2023).

The gender ideology of State *Ibuism,* based on middle-class values, is embedded in various social programs in Indonesia, including social assistance. Julia Suryakusma, who coined the

term State *Ibuism,* pointed out how Indonesia's state-engineered programs during the New Order period were inappropriate for the life of "poor village women" (Suryakusuma, 2012) As reflected in the introduction of Raskin and BLT around the early 2000s, men were by default the primary recipients of the program as the head of the household. The program design assumes that men are the primary breadwinners in the family. Similarly, in PKH, women as mothers or caregivers are entitled to receive social assistance programs on behalf of their children, and they are required to be dutiful mothers who meet the program conditions, such as by taking their children to health clinics and ensuring that school-aged children attend school. This ignores poor women's reality of juggling their double burden of life, as discussed in the previous section.

Women's default status as housewives also ignores the reality of women living in poverty in Indonesia, whereby they have to have productive roles in the family, primarily working in the informal sector and as non-wage workers for the family's livelihood. This is reflected in my fieldwork, such as the women fishermen or the women in Aceh Jaya who have to collect clams in the river due to limited access to land.

The lack of legal recognition for women as heads of household has implications for accessing social assistance programs for those who belong to women-headed households or those in informal marriages, who often miss out on social assistance programs. As highlighted by PEKKA's senior staff who work with women-headed households, many of these women are not legally divorced, nor have the paperwork to prove their status as women-headed households. Other women also have to be heads of households when their husbands migrate to find work, especially in rural regions. This lack of recognition that women can be heads of households is rooted in Indonesia's 1974 marriage law, which still applies today, where there is a clause showing men as heads of households:

> … In Indonesia, there is no recognition that women can be the head of the household. For example, while some agencies such as the Ministry of Village and Bappenas started to use the term (*perempuan kepala keluarga* – female-headed households), our law still emphasises that men are the head of household… I don't know where we should begin advocating for social assistance targeting women-headed households or advocating for changes in the 1974 law, but it isn't easy. There are many other "interests"[80].

[80] Interview NGO1, 13 June 2022. The "interests" referred here is the interests of Islamic conservative groups that still see women's role as pious wife and mother of the children, which will be discussed in the next section.

The gender construct is so entrenched in society that policy implementation often reflects existing gender norms that systematically exclude women from livelihood programs and remain unquestioned. There is an embedded gender construct within the society that ascribes the roles and responsibilities occupied by women and men. Despite men and women working equally as farmers or fishermen, this type of work is often assumed to be men's occupation, and women's role is only to "assist" the family's livelihood. This assumption around gender roles makes government social policy overlook women's significant contribution to family livelihood and excludes women by design.

The existing gender construct continues to be reproduced in social policy programming, even when women are now increasingly targeted in their economic role. As discussed, the Indonesian government's focus on micro-finance programs targeting women reflects a narrow concept of women as "small business owners" or "entrepreneurs". This notion of deservingness expects women to juggle their domestic role with earning additional income for the family. A study looking at women's entrepreneurship in Indonesia found that while entrepreneurship provides women with the flexibility they need to earn an income, at the same time, it reproduces the existing gender norms that sees women as being responsible for the care and domestic duties while earning an income (UNDP & UNICEF, 2021). The persistent gender norms that emphasise women's main responsibility in their domestic role are reflected in a survey that found 96% of husbands support their wives in running their own businesses. However, only 22% approve of their wives working in private companies (Arsana & Alibhai, 2016).

The notions of deserving women reflected in micro-finance programs rest on the idea that women get money from their husbands, the primary breadwinner. As (Hyunanda et al., 2021) highlighted, the meaning of 'women's empowerment' in Indonesia is "socially constructed based on the dual notions of femininity and productivity according to state-constructed State *Ibuism*, which maintains that their domestication is a necessary contribution to the national development." (p.14). This idea is also further perpetuated by the rise of a more conservative view of Islam, as discussed in the next section.

5.4.2 The rise of Islamic conservatism

The rise of conservative Islam during the post-*Reformasi* period reinforced the idea that women as mothers are more deserving of state assistance than as informal sector workers. While *Reformasi* created a space for women in civil society organisations to pursue a gender equality agenda, Indonesia's democratic opening simultaneously enabled the emergence of conservative religious voices. Indonesia's Muslim feminist scholar Dina Afrianty (2020)

explains that Indonesia's post-Reformasi democratisation created "wider democratic space", which provided "room for a diverse range of opinions, including those that are sustained by or advance religious doctrines" (p.65). This conservative turn manifested through religiously inspired legislation and discriminatory regional regulations[81], making women's identities "the subject of contestation of the fields of gender and faith" (Afrianty, 2020, p.66). These competing narratives between progressive and conservative gender discourses have directly influenced policy discussions within Indonesia's social protection sector.

A senior Bappenas official who worked on the issue of gender equality made the following comments when I asked her if giving women a childcare allowance would increase female labour participation; she thinks that those who hold religious conservative views would reject the idea.

> In our society, there are still strong norms and religious views. This needs to be unpacked. If we have the same narrative, it will be easier. Currently, there are still different narratives.[82]

The conservative Islamic view sees women or wives as being subordinate to men or their husbands, similar to the State *Ibuism* ideology. While within the Muslim gender movement, there are progressive and conservative groups (Nisa, 2023; Wieringa, 2015), the conservative group see gender equality and those pursuing women's rights as a threat from the West. Conservative Islamic groups introduced the idea of "gender complementarity" (Nisa, 2023) or "gender harmony" (Wieringa, 2015) instead of gender equality, where women and men have equal rights. The gender complementarity reiterated the *'kodrat perempuan'* (women's destined nature), which foregrounds the biological role of women, emphasising women's primary duty of caring for the family and their reproductive role. This does not mean that women are prohibited from engaging in economic activities. However, because of their *'kodrat',* women's noblest role is to be mothers and manage their households (Bexley et al., 2023; Nisa, 2023).

Hence, the conception of women as small business owners to bring additional income to the family is more aligned with this 'gender complementary' ideology, as being an entrepreneur or having a small business on the side still enables women to play their primary role as mothers and fulfil their duty as a pious Muslim wife who manages their household. For middle-class Muslim women in Indonesia, being an entrepreneur is considered by Muslims to be closely

[81] The National Commission of Women's Rights reported approximately 421 regional regulations that discriminate against women and religious minorities (Afrianty, 2020, p.66)
[82] Interview NG13, 8 June 2022.

associated with the Prophet Muhammad's wife, Khadijah, who successfully ran a family business while supporting her husband and fulfilling her role as a mother (Sakai & Fauzia, 2022). Sakai and Fauzia (2022) explored the idea of 'mompreneurs' or mothers and entrepreneurs among Indonesia's urban middle-class Muslim women, where many women quit their full-time jobs and started their home-based businesses. They highlighted that being a Muslim mompreneur is an expression of Indonesian women embracing modernity (Sakai and Fauzia, 2022).

Further, this conception of women through a conservative Islamic lens became more dominant with the use of social media. Eva Nisa (2023) argues that the conservative group within Islam is more successful and effective in using social media compared to advocates of a more progressive and moderate Islamic view. The conservative group, including high-profile Ulama, both men and women, celebrities and social media influencers, promotes these gender-conservative views through *da'wah*[83] and social media campaigns. It is a middle-class movement, and Indonesia's middle class is vital in shaping gender norms (Nisa, 2023). This gender norm discourse influences social policies, including social assistance programs, which we discuss here.

Research evidence demonstrates how gender norms shaped by religious and socio-cultural values have become deeply internalised across Indonesian society. A comparative study of Southeast Asian countries highlights that Indonesia stands out: its "strong socio-cultural and religious norms" place a high value on marriage and children (UNDP & UNICEF, 2021, p.40). These norms manifest in contemporary attitudes, as revealed by a survey of young Indonesian adults aged 18–40, which found persistent gendered assumptions about men as providers and women as primary caregivers (YouGov & Investing in Women, 2020).

The influence of religious conservatism on women's economic participation is particularly evident in regional variations across Indonesia. Lisa Cameron (2023) found significantly lower female labour participation rates in areas where conservative Islam is prevalent, such as West Java (44%) and Aceh (47%), compared to North Sumatra (60%), home to Christian Batak and matrilineal Minangkabau communities. This religious influence also shapes public attitudes toward women's work, with Cameron's 2022 survey of urban Indonesians revealing that both men (22%) and women (17.4%) cite childcare responsibilities as justification for opposing women's participation in the workforce.

[83] *Da'wah* is translated as "invitation" or "calling", often refer to Muslim's preaching or teaching.

These societal expectations create particular constraints for women of lower socioeconomic status. While religious norms emphasise women's domestic responsibilities, economic necessity often requires them to generate income. Research in rural NTT province and urban Bandung shows how women navigate these competing pressures by establishing small businesses near or within their homes, allowing them to maintain their domestic duties while earning income (UNDP & UNICEF, 2021). This adaptation reflects how women must balance religious and cultural expectations with economic realities, particularly in patriarchal and remote settings.

Indonesia’s conservative view also hampered the plan for Indonesia's feminist and gender equality advocates to revise the clause of the 1974 Marriage Law that places men as the default head of households. The only amendment that the government passed in 2020 to the 1974 Marriage Law was the legal age of marriage, increasing it from 16 to 19 years old as a way to combat child marriage, especially among girls in Indonesia (Robinson, 2023).

As this section illustrates, the rise of more conservative Islamic views in Indonesia, driven by the middle class, has perpetuated Indonesia’s gender norms that construct women's deservingness as wives and mothers, including in social assistance. The following section will discuss how women's economic empowerment agenda, with neoliberal influence, perpetuates women’s vulnerability and reinforces existing gender constructs.

5.4.3 The influence of the neoliberal paradigm on women's economic empowerment

The emphasis on market-based solutions to poverty and individual responsibility, often associated with neoliberalism, reinforces existing gender norms and gender orders in development policy. This approach shapes social assistance and economic empowerment programs in ways that overlook women’s vulnerabilities. As Cook et al. (2022, p.248) argue, neoliberal commitments to a smaller state and market primacy have led to social policies favouring “workfare” or “food for work” over cash transfers.

In Indonesia, this dominant ideology manifests in the government’s preference for providing women access to microfinance programs, based on the assumption that "the poor" can become "entrepreneurs" simply with access to capital. In these various microfinance and women's economic empowerment programs, women must be part of the market to be competitive and successful entrepreneurs. This idea gives poor women micro-credit, providing them access to finance to meet their financial needs to compete in the market, but it does not acknowledge the structural issues and uneven power relations women face (Syukri, 2021).

Providing women access to micro-finance sees the State's role only as a "facilitator" between women and the market. However, the Indonesian government does not protect women from different vulnerabilities by not providing broader social protection for women, especially those in the informal sector who face multiple vulnerabilities.

The neoliberal paradigm also influences the view of poverty as an individual responsibility instead of looking at the different structural causes of poverty, as Funk (2013) argues that “neoliberalism has emphasised individualism, self-reliance and responsibility for oneself” (p.185). This individual responsibility permeates the CCT model in PKH (Peck & Theodore, 2017) and the women's micro-finance initiative (Syukri, 2021). The logic behind CCT emphasises the role of women's responsibility to improve their family's economic situation, such as by meeting program conditions in PKH to receive state entitlement.

Both conceptions of women in micro-finance and CCT reinforce women's existing gender norms without questioning the political economy of poverty. The program designs of programs such as CCT and micro-finance rely on the existing gender norms that expect women to juggle their unpaid care work and their productive roles, with some programs even requiring women to include their community voluntary contribution. Further, the term ‘women’s empowerment’ "…lacks key links with power analysis and fails to challenge power relations, and they can easily become co-opted to serve an economic growth-based development mode" (Hyunanda et al., 2021, p.3)

The government's social assistance and women's economic empowerment programs have not provided enough consideration to the structural drivers that cause women living in poverty to be vulnerable in the first place. For example, in the case of Aceh Jaya, there is a lack of land that the women recipients of PKH can access and a lack of industry that can provide jobs, as illustrated by the work of McCarthy (2020) in Aceh where economically, people are "stuck between agrarian livelihood and employment in petty trade and service in ways that insufficient to support them" (p.1078). Women are even more vulnerable than men because, despite doing agricultural activities, they are farm labourers like the women I met in FGDs in Aceh Besar. While they can access micro-finance programs as part of "women’s farmers groups”, their position is still weak and vulnerable as they are labourers and not owners of the land, as farmers who own land are primarily men (McCarthy, 2020).

Meanwhile, in the remote and highly patriarchal society of Papua Province, State programs that focus on “empowerment” or giving women access to social assistance are insufficient to address the structural drivers that make women vulnerable. As discussed in Chapter Four, the

Papua provincial government targeted women as mothers in the child grant pilot program for Indigenous Papuan Children. A senior official in Papua Province who initiated the program told me that the Provincial government designed the Bangga Papua program for women as mothers as the primary recipients as a way to acknowledge women's position in Papua's patriarchal society.

> Papuan women hold an unrecognised position despite being the ones who 'work for the family.' While men are seen as protectors, women are the actual working providers. Giving social assistance to women is a way to provide acknowledgement (*penghargaan*) and to transform both mindsets and cultural patterns.[84]

On the one hand, his statement reflects how this Papuan senior official understands the importance of social assistance programs that should have a transformational effect, and tries to change the power and gender dynamics in the Papuan patriarchal society. He also challenged the national government's narrative of *"State Ibuism"* and recognised women's productive role in Papuan society. However, the broader issues faced by Papuan women, where they are being discriminated against by race and gender, have not been acknowledged. The work of Munro & Baransano (2023) highlighted that government and international development programs in Papua Region focusing on individual skills for women, such as financial skills, have overlooked the broader inequality issues in Papua. Papuan women became more disadvantaged because of issues such as violence, lack of employment opportunities, high maternal mortality and racism, which came from a root cause of dispossession and displacement due to the Indonesian government's migration and urban policy (Munro & Baransano, 2023). The multiple layers of issues further exacerbate gender inequality in Papua Province, especially among Papuan Indigenous women.

5.4.4 Dominant poverty discourse

The way poverty is conceptualised and measured fundamentally shapes how women are constructed in social assistance policy. Indonesia's dominant approach to poverty measurement relies on money-metric indicators based on household consumption, following standard practice in the Global South. This approach has significant limitations in capturing the gendered nature of poverty and contributes to narrow constructions of women's deservingness in social assistance programs. As Ruth Lister (2004) argues, poverty is not merely about material deprivation but is fundamentally relational, affecting how people relate to each other and society. This relational understanding is particularly crucial for recognising women's experiences of poverty. The household-based measurement of poverty obscures intra-household inequalities and the different ways women and men experience poverty, even

[84] Interview with LG3, 14 December 2021

within the same household. Women are often primarily responsible for managing household poverty, making difficult decisions about resource allocation, and sacrificing their own needs for other family members (Lister, 2004).

Indonesia's narrow conceptualisation of poverty through monetary metrics has led to an equally narrow construction of deservingness in social assistance programs. As Sharon Bessell (2015) highlights, conventional poverty measures ignore crucial aspects of women's lives that should inform how social assistance targets and supports women. These overlooked aspects include women's unpaid care work within households and women's contribution to household livelihood, such as in the case of women fishermen and the time poverty experienced by women juggling productive and reproductive roles (Bessell, 2015). Social assistance programs that focus on households, like in the case of Indonesia, overlook these various aspects of the experience of women who live in poverty.

This limited understanding of poverty has shaped social assistance programs in ways that reinforce rather than challenge existing gender inequalities. By focusing on social assistance targeted at the household level without considering vulnerabilities and inequalities within households, social assistance programs and other poverty reduction programs that are not yet designed using a gender-sensitive lens will continue to perpetuate women's vulnerabilities, especially those of informal sector workers.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the interdependence between gender norms, social assistance policies, and the realities women face in the informal sector across diverse regions in Indonesia. Drawing on fieldwork from Bintan, Aceh Province and Badung and the experience of women CSOs, this chapter reveals how women's productive and reproductive roles are deeply interconnected, yet social assistance policies often fail to recognise this interdependence. This disconnect between policy design and the complex reality of women's lives creates systematic patterns of exclusion, particularly for those who work to challenge traditional gender norms.

Gender norms shape ideas of deservingness in Indonesia's social assistance programs in complex and often contradictory ways. The State primarily recognises women deserving assistance in their reproductive and domestic roles as mothers and caregivers. However, this narrow focus overlooks women's crucial productive roles in supporting family livelihoods. When the State acknowledges women's economic contributions, it narrowly constructs them as 'entrepreneurs' or small-business owners, primarily offering micro-finance solutions. This

limited approach fails to address the diverse realities of women in the informal sector, such as those engaged in family-based livelihoods, such as women fishermen or women in Aceh Jaya who lack access to land. Such narrow constructions of deservingness create systematic patterns of exclusion for women whose work doesn't fit these prescribed categories.

In essence, Indonesia's prevailing *State Ibuism* gender ideology, infused with conservative religious values and a dominant one-dimensional concept of poverty, contributes to a narrow construct of deservingness that has the negative consequence of making women in the informal sector lack entitlement to social assistance. This chapter contends that such constructions are deeply rooted in the broader societal context, encapsulated by the term *State Ibuism,* shaping social protection policies and poverty reduction programs.

This chapter illustrated the need for a paradigm shift in conceptualising deservingness of women within social assistance programs. Acknowledging women's productive roles alongside their reproductive roles is imperative for developing more inclusive policies that address the nuanced challenges women face working in the informal sector or with informal jobs. Moving forward, policymakers must consider intersectionality and generate gender-sensitive, socially inclusive social assistance programs. The government needs to consider social assistance programs that can reduce women's care and economic burden, recognising and addressing women's multifaceted roles in sustaining their families and contributing to the broader economy. More holistic approaches, focusing on the structural drivers and helping women as individuals instead of only as part of their households, can help women break free from the constraints imposed by existing gender norms and pave the way for more equitable social assistance.

The narrow construction of deservingness of women that affects women in social assistance reflects broader patterns of how social and cultural values shape Indonesia's social protection system. The next chapter explores these dynamics through the lens of elderly assistance, revealing how different interpretations of deservingness at national and local levels create varying policy outcomes.

Chapter Six: Contested Deservingness: Divergent Approaches of Elderly Social Assistance in Indonesia's Multi-level Governance

6.1 Introduction

During my fieldwork in the Badung district in June 2022, I met Pak Made, a 107-year-old war veteran who exemplifies the complexities of elderly social assistance in Indonesia. Despite his service, he never received a state pension due to missing paperwork. In 2018 and 2019, Pak Made began to receive an elderly grant from the Badung district government, IDR 1,000,000 (AUD 100) per month. However, the local government stopped the program after the COVID-19 crisis. Pak Made is registered as a PKH recipient because he lives with and is being cared for by his granddaughter-in-law, Ibu Komang, who is the primary recipient of the program.

The Indonesian government defines the elderly as those who have reached 60 years of age and above, based on the Elderly Welfare Law (Law No. 13/1998). Indonesia's demographic transition has significant implications for elderly social assistance policy. Life expectancy has increased substantially over recent decades, with males experiencing an increase from 62.5 years in 1990 to 70.3 years in 2024, while female life expectancy rose from 65.7 years to 74.2 years during the same period – reflecting the global pattern of women living longer than men (Mboi et al., 2018; BPS, 2024). This demographic shift means Indonesia faces a growing elderly population requiring social protection support.

However, life expectancy varies dramatically across provinces, creating uneven demands for elderly assistance programs. In 2024, Bali recorded one of the highest life expectancy rates, with males at 71.2 years and females at 75.5 years. In contrast, the Papua provinces consistently showed the lowest figures, with Papua *Pegunungan* having the lowest male life expectancy at 62.8 years and female life expectancy at 66.7 years (BPS, 2024). These provincial variations in life expectancy reflect broader inequalities in health outcomes and economic development, which influence both the need for and capacity to provide elderly social assistance across different regions.

Pak Made's experience highlights a striking reality: Indonesia diverges from the global trend of increased social pensions for the elderly. While many Global South countries prioritise the elderly, Indonesia's coverage of social protection remains very limited. The 2018 socio-economic survey shows that less than 4% of Indonesia's elderly receive social assistance programs, and 86% do not have access to contributory social insurance benefits (TNP2K,

2023). Pak Made's experience can also be considered unique as he lives in one of the districts in Indonesia that has introduced local elderly social assistance.

While the previous chapter discussed how social assistance programs construct women as deserving in their reproductive and productive roles, this chapter analyses how different social assistance programs have varying ideas of deservingness for the elderly. Specifically, this chapter examines why different levels of commitment exist across jurisdictions and how local dynamics influence patterns of inclusion and exclusion in social assistance programs for the elderly.

This chapter explores the construct of deservingness for the elderly as a contested terrain at the national and sub-national levels. The tension between the social investment paradigms that emphasise the productivity of the elderly and cultural values that emphasise respect and care for the elderly has influenced policy entrepreneurs in designing elderly social assistance programs. This chapter is set out as follows: First, I provide some background to the problem by discussing how and why Indonesia diverges from the global trend regarding social assistance for the elderly, commonly referred to as "social pensions". Second, I will discuss the construct of "deserving elderly" in national social assistance policy and the factors contributing to this pattern. Third, I explore three case studies in Aceh Jaya, Bintan, and Badung, illustrating the local dynamics and the policy process for formulating regional elderly grants. I will end with a discussion of the key contributing factors, narratives, actors and interests that influence notions of deserving elderly and patterns of inclusion and exclusion in social assistance.

6.2 Background: How Indonesia contradicts the international trend on elderly social assistance

Indonesia's approach to social protection for the elderly presents an intriguing paradox within the Global South context. While most countries have expanded social pensions for the elderly as a key population group deserving of state support, Indonesia has maintained limited coverage. Globally, social pensions are generally acceptable because the elderly who are not part of the active labour force are considered "deserving" as "the fear of labour disincentives is less pronounced…" (Leisering, 2018b). This has made social pensions one of the least contested forms of social assistance in the Global South.

This global trend is particularly evident in Southeast Asia, where several countries have introduced non-contributory social pensions to complement their contributory system. Like other Southeast Asian countries, Indonesia's government pension system initially only

targeted state employees, such as civil servants and the armed forces, to garner their support and loyalty (Rosser & Murphy, 2023). As shown in Table 6.1, these countries started introducing social assistance for the elderly, known as the "social pension". Thailand reaches 89.1% of its elderly population through a pension-tested system that provides universal coverage for those over 60. Vietnam similarly achieves 40.9% coverage through contributory and non-contributory schemes. Even countries with development levels similar to Indonesia's, like the Philippines, maintain higher rates of elderly coverage through means-tested programs.

Table 6.1: Older persons receiving a pension in Southeast Asia

Countries	Coverage (percentage of elderly population)	Type of social pension
Thailand	89.1	Pension tested + Contributory
Viet Nam	40.9	Means-tested + Contributory
Philippines	20.5	Means-tested + Contributory
Indonesia	14.8	Contributory only (as non-contributory, only small in coverage)

Source: ILO data 2021

Indonesia's divergence from this regional pattern is striking. Based on ILO data, only 14.8% of Indonesia's elderly population receives any form of pension, primarily through contributory schemes that cover formal sector workers (ILO 2021). This limited coverage of social protection for the elderly is particularly concerning, given that poverty rates among the Indonesian elderly exceed national averages (Priebe, 2017; SMERU & TNP2K, 2020). The 2018 socio-economic survey reveals that less than 4% of Indonesia's elderly receive individual social assistance programs, while 86% lack access to contributory social insurance benefits (TNP2K, 2023).

The national government's approaches to elderly social assistance have been mainly through existing poverty-targeted social assistance programs rather than a dedicated social pension program for the elderly. As Table 6.2 demonstrates, coverage remained limited even within these programs. In 2023, only 26.72% of elderly households in the bottom 40%[85] received the national food assistance program, while just 15.78% of the elderly from the total elderly

[85] The Indonesian government uses the term "bottom 40%" to refer to the data available in its poverty database (DTKS) for households categorised as "poor and vulnerable" based on income level. However, actual social assistance programs target much smaller groups within this database: Sembako targets approximately the poorest 20% and PKH targets around the poorest 10%. The bottom 40% figure serves as an indicator to measure program reach within the broader vulnerable population that the government has data on.

population received cash transfers through PKH. Importantly, these programs targeted the elderly as household members rather than providing individual entitlement.

Table 6.2 Data on elderly households who received social assistance programs in 2020

Program Name	Key Eligibility Criteria	Coverage of elderly households that receive the program in 2023	Coverage of elderly households (Bottom 40%)
Sembako Program	Poverty-targeted	26.72% (2022) 22.74 (2023)	37.85% (2022) 31.93% (2023)
Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH)	Poverty-targeted and elderly people must live in PKH households	13.99% (2022) 15.78% (2023)	21.65% (2022) 23.18% (2023)

Source: BPS 2023

In summary, this section shows how Indonesia's divergence from regional and global trends in elderly social assistance. To understand why Indonesia has taken this distinct path, we must first examine how national policy actors construct and maintain specific notions of elderly deservingness. The following section analyses the evolution of Indonesia's national elderly social assistance programs and unpacks the factors contributing to limited political commitment at the national level.

6.3 How do national policy actors construct the idea of the elderly as deserving or non-deserving of social assistance?

The national government's construction of "deserving elderly" in social assistance has evolved from targeting only the most vulnerable elderly to incorporating the elderly within household-based programs. This evolution reflects notions of deservingness shaped by institutional constraints and broader policy paradigms, which this section will illustrate.

6.3.1 Evolution of National Elderly Social Assistance (ASLUT)

The national government's social assistance programs have specific criteria for the elderly that limit the deservingness concept of social assistance. For instance, Indonesia's first social assistance program targeting the elderly, ASLUT, started in 2006 as a pilot. ASLUT stands for *Asistensi Sosial Lanjut Usia Terlantar* or Social Assistance for the Abandoned Elderly. When the national government scaled up ASLUT in 2012, the eligibility criteria for the elderly were those who were above 60 years old and categorised as abandoned, bedridden and 'non-potential' elderly. ASLUT went through different program iterations and names as reflected in

Table 6.3. In 2017, the word 'abandoned' as a specific criterion was replaced with the word 'non-potential' in the program.[86]

According to Government Regulation No. 43 of 2004 on the Implementation of Efforts to Improve Social Welfare of the Elderly (Peraturan Pemerintah Nomor 43 Tahun 2004 tentang *Pelaksanaan Upaya Peningkatan Kesejahteraan Sosial Lanjut Usia*), the Indonesian government categorises elderly people into two groups: "potential elderly" (*Lanjut Usia Potensial*) and "non-potential elderly" (*Lanjut Usia Tidak Potensial*). Potential elderly are defined as "elderly people who are still able to perform work and/or activities that can produce goods and/or services" (Republic of Indonesia, 2004).[87]

Table 6.3 ASLUT and its predecessor and successor programs

Year	Program Name	Criteria	Coverage	Benefit Level
2006 2007–2011	Jaminan Sosial Lanjut Usia (JSLU) – social insurance for the elderly	Abandoned	Pilot in 5 provinces – 2,500 elderly and increasing	IDR 200.000 (AUD 20)-IDR 300,000 (AUD 30)
2011	JSLU	Abandoned	National 13,250 elderly	
2012–2017	ASLUT	Abandoned & bedridden	26,500	IDR 300.000 (AUD 30)/month
2017–2018	ASLU	Non-potential		IDR 200,000 (AUD 20)/month
2019–2020	Bantu LU (Progress LU)	Elderly who live alone or with their partner, non-potential and potential elderly, not recipients of PKH or other social assistance programs	30,000 – from DTKS and regional data	IDR 2,700,000 (AUD 270) / year – 1,500,000 (AUD 15) for the elderly, 500,000 (AUD 50) for their family & 700,000 (AUD 70) for social rehabilitation therapy
2020	ATENSI – LU	Unclear	Elderly in poverty database	The program covers social services beyond the cash-transfer program, linking the elderly to existing social assistance programs like

[86] This was to align the elderly social assistance program with the Law No 23/2014 on Local Government, which includes assigning responsibilities to different levels of the state regarding elderly issues. For the category of 'abandoned' elderly, this became the responsibility of the local government; hence ASLUT officially targets 'non-potential' elderly. However, it is unclear how the design or features of the program has changed.

[87] In contrast, non-potential elderly refers to "elderly people who are unable to earn a living and therefore depend on assistance from others" (Republic of Indonesia, 2004).

				PKH or Sembako if they are in the poverty database.

Source: (SMERU Research Institute & The National Team For The Acceleration Of Poverty Reduction, 2022; TNP2K, 2021)

Despite the national government scaling up ASLUT in 2012, the program coverage remained stagnant, with only up to 30,000 recipients of ASLUT per year in 2017 (World Bank, 2020c). The slow progress of ASLUT contrasted with other MOSA's flagship social assistance programs, such as the PKH and food assistance programs,[88] which the national government increased significantly, as the previous chapter pointed out. Other studies found that many elderly individuals who met the ASLUT criteria, such as being bedridden and living alone without sufficient support, did not receive the program (Adioetomo et al., 2013).

ASLUT was provided only to the elderly who are abandoned, bedridden and unable to work, which suggests that the elderly are partially deserving of social assistance. The program's underlying idea is that the State should be the last resort to provide income support when the family has abandoned or neglected the elderly or can no longer physically work and earn an income. However, the program was very symbolic as the national government has not prioritised support for the elderly in its social programs.

6.3.2 Shifting approach to elderly social assistance programs: social rehabilitation and integration into the CCT

In 2016, the national government discontinued ASLUT, replacing it with two different interventions for the elderly. The first approach is "social rehabilitation" (Resos) under the Directorate General of Social Rehabilitation (DG Resos) in MOSA, with assistance that includes social care and support for families of the elderly and social therapy. The program targets the elderly who live alone or with their spouse and those who are not recipients of PKH. However, this "social rehabilitation" approach has provided little coverage.

The "social rehabilitation" assistance for the elderly has undergone frequent regulatory changes between 2017 and 2022. Table 6.3 reflects the changes in the program iteration post-ASLUT due to the turnover in ministers and senior officials at the Ministry of Social Affairs. Under the Minister of Social Affairs, Tri Rismaharini (2021–2023), the elderly program was incorporated into "ATENSI" (*Asistensi Rehabilitasi Sosial* or Social Rehabilitation Assistance), a broader social rehabilitation initiative targeting various vulnerable groups: people with disability, children, drug addicts, the elderly and victims of trafficking. ATENSI aims to fulfil

88 Indonesia's food assistance programs here is BNPT, which was later renamed Kartu Sembako.

basic needs *(pemenuhan kebutuhan hidup layak)* and provides rehabilitation services by linking the elderly with various assistance, including social assistance. However, only the elderly in the poverty database can access existing social assistance programs.[89]

These continual program changes have severely impacted local implementation. TNP2K and SMERU conducted a study and found that regional governments struggled to understand the mechanisms of successive programs like Bantu LU (*Bantuan Lanjut Usia* or Aid for Elderly) and Progres LU (Program Lanjut Usia or Program for the Elderly)[90] (SMERU Research Institute & The National Team For The Acceleration Of Poverty Reduction, 2022). Moreover, social rehabilitation support has become irregular, has limited coverage, and is restricted to certain districts or cities. The constant program revisions have thus created a gap between policy intent and the local government's capacity to deliver assistance effectively.

Despite the changes in program names, the problem of deficient coverage has continued[91] , as ATENSI coverage remains very limited. Based on the data from the Indonesian Bureau of Statistics, only 2.73% of the total Indonesian elderly population receives the ATENSI program, a slight increase from 1.11% in 2022 (BPS, 2023). According to the BPS report, the ATENSI program provides social rehabilitation intervention services targeted at the elderly, which are family-based, community-based, and institution-based interventions.[92] These criteria for the ATENSI program target the elderly who face "social welfare issues" or "*masalah sosial",* which include poverty, abandonment, disability, isolation, victims of disaster and violence, exploitation and discrimination, as well as elderly people with challenges in social functioning (BPS, 2023). However, no study has examined how ATENSI is being implemented.

The second approach is for the national government to integrate elderly beneficiaries into the existing CCT (PKH program) to expand social assistance coverage to the elderly. In 2017, the Indonesian national government added the elderly and people with disabilities as a new PKH criterion. This approach differed from ASLUT's direct individual payments – instead, elderly

[89] See the Ministry of Social Affairs operational guidelines on ATENSI LU (Kementrian Sosial RI, 2021).
[90] Bantu LU (*Bantuan Lanjut Usia* - Elderly Assistance) and Progres LU (*Program Lanjut Usia* - Elderly Program) represent Indonesia's evolved approach to elderly social assistance, transitioning from the previous ASLUT model to a more comprehensive support framework that include social treatment services, therapeutic interventions, family support mechanisms (SMERU Research Institute & The National Team For The Acceleration Of Poverty Reduction, 2022)
91 The last data on ASLUT that can be found was from 2017 where the Indonesian government allocated IDR 6,1 billion (or AUD 6.1 million) to target 30,000 elderly beneficiaries (World Bank, 2020).
92 There is no specific social assistance under the ATENSI program as the focus is on social services. However, the program mentioned supporting the elderly from the existing household-based social assistance programs: PKH and BPNT (BPS, 2024).

assistance became part of household-based transfers. Under the Ministry of Social Affairs regulation No. 10/2017, households with elderly members would receive an additional 1.9 million rupiah annually through PKH (Arifin et al., 2023)

The government's decision to add the elderly to PKH increases coverage. In 2019, 1,1 million older people received PKH benefits (World Bank, 2020). Data from BPS also shows that the percentage of elderly individuals benefitting from PKH increased from 4.25% in 2017 to 15.78% in 2023 (BPS, 2023). On the other hand, many elderly are excluded: Only 23.18% of the elderly in the bottom 40% received the PKH program (BPS, 2023). This limited coverage reveals the shortcomings of relying on household-based poverty targeting to reach vulnerable elderly populations.

The government's shift from individual-based assistance (ASLUT) to household-based transfer (PKH) created new barriers to elderly access, including the elderly's eligibility for the program. First, elderly recipients are often unaware they are recipients of PKH, as the benefit of PKH goes to the PKH caretaker[93] rather than directly to them. A local social affairs official in Bintan explained:

> Sometimes, the elderly person does not know that they receive social assistance. When the elderly are the head of the household, they can be the main recipient of PKH...But if they are just household members listed in the *Kartu Keluarga* (Family Card), their name would be in the (PKH) payment list, but the money goes to the main PKH recipient.[94]

Second, the Ministry (MOSA) constantly changes PKH policy and regulations based on the yearly budget allocation. MOSA often change the eligibility criteria for the elderly program to match the budget allocation. In a focus group discussion with former PKH technical assistance staff, they described how this budget volatility influences PKH eligibility:

> In 2016, all elderly (from ASLUT) received it (PKH benefit), but in 2017, they no longer received it. In 2016, the government created bank accounts (for the elderly who received ASLUT and then PKH), but in 2017, these accounts were closed. The policy followed the budget.[95]

This budget-driven approach meant ASLUT recipients could receive PKH for one year but no longer receive the program the following year. This reveals how fiscal constraints have affected the consistent support for elderly welfare.

[93] PKH caretaker refer to the female-head of PKH household
[94] Interview with LG12, 29 June 2022
[95] FGD with Former PKH technical assistance team PI1, 8 June 2022

Third, an attempt to restrict eligibility through age requirements exposed legal contradictions in policy design. When MOSA tried changing the age criteria from 60 to 70 years to reduce the budget allocation, they were confronted with conflicts with the Elderly Welfare Law (Law No. 13/1998).[96] As a senior Bappenas official noted,

> The current (fiscal) capacity is minimal… During Pak Hari's time (previous MOSA Directorate General), we added 70 years old, but what was the (legal) basis of this? The Ministry of Finance would not move if we did not have a legal basis.[97]

Hence, currently, the Ministry of Social Affairs assigns criteria for the elderly to receive PKH, such as being above 60 years old and being recorded on the family card of the PKH household (PKH, 2023 guideline).[98]

These patterns reveal how the national government's conception of the "deserving elderly" remains contested, shaped by changing leadership and budget constraints. The frequent changes in program eligibility criteria, reliance on household-based delivery mechanisms, and attempts to impose age restrictions reflect a broader reluctance to commit to inclusive elderly social assistance. Rather than treating elderly assistance as an entitlement based on age and vulnerability, the government retains a residual approach limited by fiscal and administrative constraints. The next section examines why particular ideas about deserving elderly have dominated social assistance policy.

6.3.3 Why does national elderly social assistance remain limited?

We will now consider the key factors that have constrained the national government's construction of deservingness for the elderly. Several national government officials interviewed acknowledged that adding the elderly to PKH was not ideal. However, it provided a way to allocate the budget for the elderly's social assistance. A senior MOSA official (Director-level) who was in charge of planning and budget noted that:

> Adding the elderly as a PKH component was a forced decision. In conditional cash transfer theory, there shouldn't be conditions for the elderly and people with disabilities – this doesn't exist in international practice. However, due to budgetary politics, we accepted it… It was a way to extend coverage to people with disabilities and the elderly.[99]

[96] The Elderly Welfare Law defines elderly as those who have reached 60 years old and above.
[97] Interview with NG 3, 19 Nov 2021.
[98] PKH Guideline in October 2023 from the MOSA's website.
[99] Interview with NG 10, 27 January 2022.

Institutional issues within MOSA in terms of budget and priority

First, institutional issues within the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) have marginalised elderly social assistance in terms of priority and budget. The rapid expansion of PKH under the Directorate General of Social Protection and Security (DG Linjamsos) has created an imbalanced resource allocation within MOSA. While PKH received strong political support and substantial funding, as discussed in Chapter Four, programs for the elderly under the Directorate General of Social Rehabilitation (DG Resos) remained underfunded.[100]

The Indonesian Parliament consistently rejected MOSA's request for additional elderly assistance funding; hence, MOSA and Bappenas officials took a pragmatic solution, incorporating elderly beneficiaries into PKH. One official who used to be in charge of planning and budgeting in MOSA explained:

> Our requests for more funding for the elderly were unsuccessful. This (adding the elderly into PKH) is a matter of politics of budgeting. Severe disability and the elderly were added to PKH, so we could secure the budget.101

The decision to include the elderly in PKH was a compromise between the then Minister of Social Affairs and Bappenas, and the Ministry of Finance. During the leadership of Minister Khofifah[102] (2014–2019), she advocated for expanding social assistance for the elderly. However, she faced resistance from both parliament and government agencies, Bappenas and the Ministry of Finance. Hence, as a compromise, the government added the elderly as additional criteria in PKH, together with people with disability.

> Ibu Khofifah wanted to be a champion… Ibu Vivi in Bappenas went for a middle-ground that when the elderly in a PKH family…they would be included in PKH, but if they live alone, they would receive the “social rehabilitation” program.[103]

Further, a Bappenas official noted that expanding coverage for elderly and disabled people would require reducing PKH's current coverage of 10 million households.[104] This trade-off illustrates how working within PKH's framework creates competition between vulnerable groups for limited resources.

Lack of political incentives

Second, the lack of political incentives has constrained budget allocation for elderly social assistance. With the elderly comprising only 10.82% (roughly 29.3 million) of the total general population in 2021, national politicians such as national parliament members (DPR) and the

[100] This is a similar issue with the underfunding for program targeting “vulnerable children” PKSA discussed in Chapter Four which is also under DG Resos.
[101] Interview with NG 10, 27 January 2022.
[102] MOSA Minister in 2014-2019
[103] FGD PI1 with Former PKH Technical Assistance team, 8 June 2022.
[104] Interview with NG11, 8 February 2022.

President give less attention to the elderly as a target group. As one of the Bappenas directors noted, "For the elderly, because the population is still small, we ignore the elderly. That is why I think the issue of the elderly is not progressing in Indonesia."[105]

This political calculation becomes clear in national elections. President Jokowi's campaigns prioritise programs targeting nearly 50% of voters under 35 (Fionna & Hutchinson, 2019), such as PKH for young families and Kartu Pra Kerja for youth employment. As one senior Indonesian academic who has been working on the issue of the elderly made the following observation:

> There is the impression that the elderly policy is not yet needed. Youth unemployment is a big issue. So the elderly are for later (in future). The policymakers do not understand that the elderly need attention.[106]

The lack of political priority has also stalled crucial policy reform. DPR has not yet passed the revision of Indonesia's outdated Elderly Welfare Law (Law No. 13/1998) that still defines the elderly as those 60 years and above, despite Indonesia's life expectancy increasing to 71 years (Hakim, 2020). In 2024, the life expectancy of men is 70 years, and women's is 74 years (BPS 2025). Despite the initial steps of MOSA proposing the revision,[107] the process has stalled in parliament, reflecting the low priority given to elderly issues. One of the researchers working for a think tank that works on elderly social assistance made the following observation:

> The advocacy for revising the laws on Elderly Social Welfare has been abandoned for five years and has not been discussed in the PROLEGNAS. It just disappeared in the 2020 PROLEGNAS, especially with the Pandemic.[108]

The outdated law creates significant barriers for the government to reform Indonesia's social protection approach for the elderly. The current age criteria that define the elderly as those who are 60 years and above would require the government to have a larger budget for elderly social assistance. With Indonesia's fiscal space constraints, it is not feasible for the Indonesian government to provide a large coverage for the elderly. As a senior official argued:

> Like in Greece, we need to increase it [age criteria] to 75; people have to work until 75[109] when they enter pension age… that way, there will not be many people … 60 years old, they are still healthy… *Kita kasih pensiun, rugi bandar negara!* [The State will be at a loss if we give all of them a pension.][110]

[105] Interview with NG13, 8 June 2022
[106] Interview with RAT 3,7 February 2022.
[107] Despite being part of the current administration's Prolegnas 2020–2024 agenda, it has not advanced in subsequent years' Prolegnas agendas.
[108] Interview with RAT5, 17 February 2022.
[109] After doing a fact check, her statement is incorrect. Greece did increase their pension age to 67 and not 75.
[110] Interview with NG3, 19 November 2021.

Limited policy coalition

Third, competing institutional interests and a lack of consensus between key social protection policy actors constrained the national government's construct of deserving elderly. Bappenas and TNP2K officials, as key policy entrepreneurs in Indonesia's social protection policy, have different visions of how the national government should expand coverage of social assistance for the elderly. TNP2K produced a study recommending that the Indonesian government introduce specific social assistance to the elderly or elderly grants (TNP2K, 2018). In contrast, Bappenas and MOSA integrate the elderly into PKH to expand social assistance coverage for the elderly, as previously discussed. This lack of consensus weakens advocacy efforts within the government to increase social assistance coverage for the elderly beyond the existing social assistance programs.

The challenge of expanding social protection to the elderly also stems from government officials' limited ability to advocate effectively with political actors on the importance of social protection. A senior civil society activist working on poverty reduction observed that the government technocrats failed to communicate the strategic importance of social protection to parliament members. He specifically critiqued Bappenas for relying too heavily on international agencies' inputs rather than developing its policy rationale.[111] He argued that Bappenas should reframe expanding social protection, including elderly social assistance, as crucial to Indonesia's strategy for escaping the middle-income trap.[112]

Limited civil society advocacy further weakens the elderly's position in social assistance policy. The elderly in Indonesia represent a population with constrained political influence due to their relatively small numbers and limited capacity for collective action (Ho, 2022). Hence, civil society organisations play an important role in advocating for the elderly as a target group. However, in Indonesia, CSOs advocating for the elderly remain limited, especially those that focus on the issue of social protection and poverty.

Two groups of CSOs started to advocate for expanding social assistance for the elderly. However, it is unclear how the civil society groups are forming a coalition to pressure the government or the parliament. First, the women's organisations, particularly PEKKA and KAPAL Perempuan, work directly at the grassroots level and have documented how older women are excluded from social assistance programs. While these organisations have begun

[111] Interview with RAT6, 28 February 2022.
[112] Ibid.

advocating nationally, the COVID-19 crisis disrupted their momentum.[113] Further, their influence remains stronger at sub-national rather than national levels (Lockley et al., 2020)

The second type of CSO is the research think tank that focuses on conducting studies to raise the issue of limited social assistance for the elderly. PRAKARSA, one of the few think tanks focused on elderly issues,[114] has produced studies and documentaries highlighting elderly vulnerability and limited social protection (Djamhari et al., 2020). However, their advocacy has shifted towards Universal Basic Income (UBI) and building coalitions with other CSOs around these broader issues.[115] At the same time, TNP2K engaged the SMERU Research Institute to provide studies on social protection for the elderly, especially in three provinces: Jakarta, Yogyakarta and Bali (SMERU Research Institute & The National Team For The Acceleration Of Poverty Reduction, 2022). However, there was limited collaboration between these different CSOs to pressure the government or parliament to prioritise elderly social assistance.

International agencies' role in advocating for the elderly issue, like UNICEF for children, is notably weaker. In contrast, HelpAge International has been influential in expanding elderly social assistance globally (Von Gliszczynski & Leisering, 2015), but their presence in Indonesian policy advocacy remains limited. Some international agencies, including the ILO, ADB, and the DFAT-funded MAHKOTA program, work on advocacy for social assistance for the elderly. However, there is still a lack of coordination and a strong coalition to push the elderly social protection agenda.

This section has examined the evolution of elderly social assistance in Indonesia and how 'the elderly' is constructed in Indonesia's social assistance programs. The country's elderly social assistance programs are shaped by a specific notion of deservingness that leaves most Indonesian elderly without social assistance and not covered by social insurance. This is despite the government targeting the elderly through existing programs in social assistance, social rehabilitation programs and integrating the elderly in the CCT. I have also discussed the three factors contributing to this specific notion of the deserving elderly in social assistance: institutional issues within MOSA, the lack of political incentives and the limited policy coalition within and outside the national government. In the following section, we will look at district-level government elderly grants. At the district level, we will see what and how local dynamics have spurred the introduction of elderly social assistance.

[113] Interview with NGO01 and NGO02, February 2022
[114] PRAKARSA stands for Society Initiative for State Welfare and Alternative Development, an institution for research and advocacy, and can be considered a civil society organisation.
[115] Interview RAT5, 17 February 2022.

6.4 Why and how sub-national policy actors construct the idea that the elderly deserve social assistance

In counterpoint to the national government, what makes Indonesia's case particularly interesting is that despite the national government's limited commitment, several regional governments have initiated their elderly social assistance programs. Under Indonesia's decentralised governance framework since the early 2000s, districts and cities have more authority over social protection and aging policies compared to the provincial government.[116] Further, in the last few years, regional governments have started introducing an ageing policy, which can include social assistance as one of the items the regional government provides (Lestari et al., 2022).

This chapter examines three such districts – Aceh Jaya, Bintan, and Badung.[117] To understand how local dynamics influence the outcomes of social assistance policy for the elderly, I consider how sub-national policy actors construct the idea of the elderly as deserving or non-deserving of social assistance. I will illustrate the interplay between local dynamics and the formulation of localised notions of deservingness that underpin the district elderly grant.

Table 6.4: Summary of social assistance for the elderly in the three districts:

District	Name of Program	Year of introduction	Criteria	Benefit level
Aceh Jaya	ASLURETI	2015 (Ongoing)	Age 70+ N(universal)	IDR 600,000 (AUD 60) per semester

[116] TNP2K (2021) did a study on regional social assistance in three provinces, DKI Jakarta, Jogjakarta and Bali Province and found that while both province and district levels have elderly social assistance, only the DKI Jakarta province has specific elderly social assistance. In the other two provinces, the district-level governments were the ones that introduced social assistance programs for the elderly. Therefore, I focus my thesis to look at district-level social assistance programs.

[117] This does not mean that other districts do not have elderly social assistance. In Papua Province for example, the district of Paniai has introduced an elderly grant, but it was not logistically possible for me to go to Papua province for this research.

Badung	Bansos Lansia	2018 (Not disbursed in COVID-19)	Age 60+ (2016 universal), in 2022, started to be poverty-targeted (based on the national poverty database)	IDR 1,000,000 (AUD 100) /month in 2018-2019 (before COVID-19)
Bintan	BLT Lansia	2021 (Introduced during the COVID-19 period)	Elderly with income below IDR 1,500,000 (AU 150) per month, but limited to one household per elderly	IDR 100,000 (AUD 10) / month in 2023

6.4.1 Case Study 1: Aceh Jaya's ASLURETI

> If we give the elderly in the village IDR 10,000 (AUD$1), they will kiss our hand, let alone if we give them IDR 900,000 (AUD 90), they will hug us. (Former *Bupati* Aceh Jaya, August 2022)

The statement above came from my interview during my fieldwork with the former *Bupati* (District Head) of Aceh Jaya, Pak Azhar, conducted in July 2022. Aceh Jaya is one of the pioneer districts in Indonesia that introduced elderly social assistance, also known as ASLURETI *(Asistensi Lanjut Usia Resiko Tinggi)* or high-risk elderly assistance. Aceh Jaya government has provided elderly social assistance since 2015, despite its relatively remote location, which is far from Indonesia's national capital. Further, the district government did not receive any support from the development agencies or CSOs when they introduced the program.

ASLURETI is a simple cash transfer program for the elderly: all elderly people above 70 are entitled to the program. The local government of Aceh Jaya designed ASLURETI to be comprehensive in its elderly coverage. Using the district's life expectancy of 67.40 years[118] as a baseline, they set eligibility at the age of 70 and above.[119] This approach enabled the program to reach nearly all of Aceh Jaya's 3,2000 elderly residents in the age group by 2021.

[118] In 2024, the life expectancy in Aceh Haya for men is 65,75 while women is 69,73 (BPS, 2025)
[119] Interview LG17, 4 August 2022.

Table 6.5 Key Features of the ASLURETI Program

Criteria	All elderly people above 70 years old
Coverage	3,000 elderly
Benefit level	IDR 200,000 / month
Distribution	Cash, before *meugang*, every 3–4 months

A unique feature of ASLURETI is that the Aceh Jaya government aligns the disbursement with local festivities called *Meugang.* Meugang is an Acehnese tradition that takes place at the beginning of Ramadhan (fasting month) and the Eid holidays. During *Meugang*, the Acehnese family has the tradition of cooking and enjoying meat dishes. Even though ASLURETI is a monthly cash transfer, the local government disburses the elderly grant in a lump sum payment every quarter and aligns the timing with *Meugang*[120].

As Pak Azhar told me in the interview, when I asked him about his motivation to introduce ASLURETI when he was a *Bupati:*[121]

> Before *meugang,* when a son/daughter told the parents they could not afford to buy meat for the season, the elderly would tell their children, “Just be patient". But because we give the elderly some money for *meugang*, when the son/daughter complain that they do not have money, the elderly parents would reassure and say “Nak (Child), the *Bupati* just delivered some money, here take two thousand rupiahs (AUD 20)” This form a good relationship, not only with us (between the *Bupati* and the people), but we give the object of happiness to build the good relationship of a family.[122]

Firstly, Pak Azhar's approach to ASLURETI reflected his populist leadership style, particularly in using direct cash distribution to build relationships with the community. He transformed a simple cash transfer into a symbolic gesture of care by timing payments with Meugang and personally participating in distribution alongside other officials at the *Kecamatan* (sub-district) level. As he explained above, the program allowed elderly parents to help their children during important cultural celebrations, creating bonds between leaders and people and within families. This gesture of leaders caring for the people aligns with the “performative features” of populism (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014, p.381). Giving this cash directly to the elderly without a

[120] For the poor, access to meat is rare, so eating meat during religious festivals plays an important role in their nutritional security.
[121] When I interviewed Pak Azhar in 2022 he was no longer the Bupati of Aceh Jaya as he finished his term in 2017. Despite Pak Azhar no longer being a Bupati, the ASLURETI was continuing when I visited the district in 2022 and at the writing of this thesis.
[122] Interview LG16, 27 July 022

bank transfer is also more practical, because remote Aceh Jaya ATMs are not accessible to people, especially the elderly.

Moreover, the imperative of local leaders like Pak Azhar to maintain strong ties with the people of Aceh is intrinsically linked to the unique historical context of Aceh Province. Aceh Province is a region that has demanded independence from Indonesia several times. Many current *Bupatis* in Aceh Province are former GAM[123] combatants, including Pak Azhar. These GAM leaders used to fight for independence for Aceh. After the national government gave Aceh a special autonomy status and the GAM leaders became the local district leaders or *Bupati*, their previous fight for independence was no longer relevant. A senior Acehnese academic made the following observation when I asked him why a few district leaders in Aceh, such as in Aceh Jaya and Sabang, introduced a local social assistance program:

> The leaders took the populist approach due to the post-conflict situation. They (the district heads) are ex-GAM combatants. That is how they get voters to create innovative programs that look generous. Previously, ex-GAM campaigned about "MOU Helsinki[124]" It was like their bible; wherever they went, that's all they talked about… Now they (the people) do not care anymore about the "flag";[125] these things no longer interest the people.[126]

The statement implies that social policy has become the new focus among local leaders in Aceh to enhance their popularity. As "Aceh Independence" was no longer a common goal between leaders and the people, Aceh political elites like Pak Azar needed to offer something more tangible to the people, such as providing an elderly grant.

Secondly, Pak Azhar introduced an elderly grant as he needed to advance his political career after finishing his term as head of the district. In the case of Pak Azhar, he introduced ASLURETI in his second term when he could no longer run for the head of the district election. However, he could advance his political career to the provincial level, which he did. After finishing his term as *Bupati*, Pak Azhar became a provincial parliament member. When I interviewed Pak Azhar in 2022, he was a member of the Aceh Provincial Parliament (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Aceh or DPRA*) from his party, Partai Aceh. As he told me in our interview

[123] GAM is Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, political movement for Acehnese seeking independence. It was the freedom fighter movement before Aceh became a Special Autonomy Province.
[124] The Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is a peace agreement between the Government of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement, signed in Helsinki, Finland, in 2005 to mark the end of three decades of conflict.
[125] Flags symbolise the demand for independence.
[126] Interview with RAT11, 26 July 2022.

> The policy that I did was memorable until now. “Can you become the *Bupati* again?” they asked, and I said, “I can’t,” and they said, “Who will be taking care of us later?” We tried to do it again, but it was discontinued, and I was disappointed.[127]

Pak Azhar liked to think that ASLURETI was his legacy and attributed the program’s success to his leadership. Sumarto’s study on clientelism and social welfare in Indonesia called this practice “credit claiming,” which is common for political elites who claim social programs for their electoral advantage (Sumarto, 2013). Contrary to his statement, when I visited the Aceh Jaya district, the ASLURETI program had been continued. Pak Azhar’s successor, *Bupati* Irfan TB, continued the ASLURETI program until the end of his term in 2022 (Redaksi, 2022). The latest online media report also found that the Interim Aceh Jaya *Bupati* continued the program in June 2023.[128] The continuation of ASLURETI with the support of Pak Azhar’s successors indicates that maintaining the notions of the elderly deserving the state social assistance brings political advantage for the successor *Bupati*.[129]

In summary, the introduction and continuation of ASLURETI reflect how local political dynamics shape constructions of elderly deservingness in post-conflict Aceh. Three key political factors drove Pak Azhar's framing of the elderly as deserving of social assistance: his populist approach to leadership, the unique post-conflict context of Aceh, and his broader political aspirations. Further, ASLURETI fits the local values and expectations as the Aceh Jaya government linked it with the *Meugang* festival and made the program relevant in Aceh Jaya. In the following section, I discuss the role of local state officials in maintaining notions of deserving elderly in social assistance.

On my last day of fieldwork in Calang, Aceh Jaya, I planned to interview the head of the Aceh Jaya Dinsos office. The Dinsos office was quite different from other Dinsos offices. The Aceh Jaya Dinsos office was quiet and somewhat run-down, which made me wonder if the office was fully functional. Despite the basic infrastructure and the few staff, surprisingly, someone from the Dinsos office had the initiative to introduce an elderly social assistance program in the region.

[127] Interview with LG16, 27 July 2022.
[128] In 2023, Aceh Jaya was governed by an interim Bupati -- a Provincial government official – due to the local election scheduled for 2024. In February 2025, a new Bupati, Safwandi, was elected, but it remains unknown whether ASLURETI will be continued under his administration
[129] From my interview with Bappeda officials, I see that he continued the previous program because the Bupati successor is Pak Azhar’s former Vice Bupati.

While I did not meet the head of Dinsos Aceh Jaya, I learned about the person who designed the ASLURETI program, Pak Dani.[130] Pak Dani is a middle-level bureaucrat in Aceh Jaya's social affairs office. My first impression of Pak Dani, when I started the interview, was that he was quiet compared to his other colleague in the interview with us. However, when Pak Dani started to explain the idea of ASLURETI, he could articulate the narrative about the program well.

> This ASLURETI, in the central (government), was called ASLUT. We see the vulnerable age with high risk. The age above 70 years is the vulnerable age. So, we called it ASLURETI, so it is different (from the central government), and it is universal. Anyone in that age group.[131]

Several enabling factors led to the institutionalisation of elderly social assistance programs in Aceh Jaya. First, local state officials like Pak Dani played an instrumental role in translating political vision into implementable policy in Aceh Jaya. While *Bupati* Azhar proposed a generous monthly payment of IDR 500,000, local officials adapted this to fiscal realities, suggesting a smaller amount distributed quarterly. More significantly, officials like Pak Dani shaped the program's universal approach through the locally resonant concept of *"tidak pandang bulu"* (indiscriminate support) rather than using technical terms like 'universal' or complex poverty-targeting criteria. As he explained in our interview:

> It is one of the ways the district gives their attention to helping our elderly parents *"tidak pandang bulu",* whether they are rich, whether they are pensioners (government pensioners), and above 70 years old, they will receive ASLURETI.[132]

Moreover, the local state officials reframe the program and made it more accessible and understandable to the community. The local government do not use "poverty" as a criterion for elderly grants like the national government's social assistance programs. According to Pak Dani, as the program has been going on since 2015, Aceh Jaya citizens already understand the criteria of ASLURETI; hence, citizens do not complain about who is deserving or non-deserving of the program. In Aceh Jaya, I visited one household with an elderly couple. Both the husband and wife receive the ASLURETI program. This differs from the national and other local elderly social assistance, which is often given as one grant per household. In Aceh Jaya, ASLURETI is an individual entitlement.

The second enabling factor is the consensus between various local agencies in Aceh Jaya. The consensus between Dinsos and Bappeda around the *"tidak pandang bulu"* concept

[130] A few people within the Dinsos office and his superior, the Dinsos Secretary, pointed out to me that Pak Dani had been the 'main initiator' of ASLURETI since it was introduced in 2015.
[131] Interview LG19, 5 August 2022.
[132] Interview with LG17, 4 August 2022.

proved crucial for the continuity of the ASLURETI program despite the changes in political leadership. While Dinsos officials like Pak Dani shaped the program's universal approach, Bappeda complemented this by embedding ASLURETI within district development plans and demonstrating its broader social impact. Bappeda, as a planning agency, played an essential role in ensuring that ASLURETI is part of the district's plan and budget, including ensuring the program meets the district's development outcomes. Aceh Jaya's Bappeda officials were more articulate in talking about ASLURETI achievements compared to Dinsos officials by linking ASLURETI to broader development objectives:

> Since we implemented the ASLURETI program, there has been an increase in the life expectancy rate in Aceh Jaya District, approaching 70 years. Before ASLURETI, it was below 65. This is an increase. The results of the ASLURETI program have led to an improvement in public health, a reduction in poverty rates, and an increase in local economic activities. As the elderly shop locally and mostly in the sub-district, the community's purchasing power has risen. This has led to economic growth and a decrease in the poverty rate. That is the essence of the ASLURETI program.[133]

Third, to ensure sustainability, Bappeda developed a local regulation to ensure that the district's leadership changes do not affect the continuity of the program. According to Aceh Jaya Bappeda officials, having ASLURETI in the regional medium-term development plan (*Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Daerah* or RPJMD) would be one of the strategies to ensure sustainability without relying on who would win the district head election in 2024. In order to advocate to the parliament, Bappeda officials used a program evaluation on the ASLURETI program produced by a DFAT program, MAHKOTA (MAHKOTA, 2017)[134.] As the Head of Bappeda noted:

> The local parliament also supported ASLURETI; We inserted ASLURETI in the Qanun Aceh Jaya No. 5 of 2019 on social welfare. And *alhamdulillah* (thank God), we also developed the five-year plan for 2021–2026 to fill the gap (in leadership), and the program is still there. We have ensured the local regulations allow the program to continue despite the changes in the B*upati*.[135]

The fourth enabling factor is Aceh Jaya and Aceh Province's "special autonomy" (Otsus) status, which enables the district to introduce and institutionalise elderly social assistance. As in the Otsus region, districts and cities in Aceh province, like Aceh Jaya, received the Special Autonomy Fund (DOKA). With an annual budget of IDR 7 billion, ASLURETI's implementation depends on this DOKA funding channelled from the national government through the province

[133] Interview with LG17, 4 August 2022.
[134] MAHKOTA, an Australian funded bilateral program to Indonesia, conducted a study on ASLURETI in 2017, to see the impact of the program towards poverty reduction and economic growth in the region. The Aceh Jaya local government has used the result of this study to promote ASLURETI, including receiving a local innovation award from the national government.
[135] Interview with LG17, 4 August 2022.

to the districts. However, this funding arrangement creates unique challenges, particularly in navigating provincial scrutiny of the program's universal approach. This funding source is essential because, as a small district with no specific industry that can generate revenue in the region, Aceh Jaya will not have the fiscal capacity if it relies only on the national budget allocation or PAD.

Further, as a district with a special autonomy status, Aceh Jaya also received less scrutiny from the Supreme Audit Office (BPK). While in the two districts, BPK audited the local elderly grant program and identified various issues that the local government need to address. But in the case of Aceh Jaya,. BPK audit findings were not an issue. As illustrated by Pak Dani:

> Thankfully, there are no specific notes from the BPK. They went into the field, observed the community, asked the elderly, and felt it was essential. BPK recommends that the disbursement use bank accounts, but after interviewing the people, it turned out to be ineffective. Why ineffective? If it involves the community, especially the elderly, going to the bank, it would be better to provide it directly to them, especially when someone is sick.[136]

The case of ASLURETI demonstrates how local constructions of elderly deservingness emerge from a complex interplay of cultural values, political interests, and bureaucratic innovation. Through the alignment with Meugang traditions and the locally resonant concept of *"tidak pandang bulu"*, Aceh Jaya officials transformed a simple cash transfer into a culturally meaningful form of support. The elderly are constructed as deserving not only because of their age-related vulnerability but also because of their role in maintaining family bonds, particularly during important cultural celebrations.

The program's success and sustainability stem from how different actors' interests converged. While former *Bupati* Azhar initiated ASLURETI as part of post-conflict populist politics, local bureaucrats in Dinsos and Bappeda ensured its continuation by embedding it within district regulations and development plans. Their interpretation of universal coverage through *"tidak pandang bulu"* created a distinctive approach that differed from the national government's targeted programs. However, ASLURETI's implementation reflects Aceh's special autonomy's unique opportunities and constraints. While DOKA funding provided fiscal space for innovation, local officials had to navigate provincial scrutiny of their universal approach carefully. This tension between universal and targeted approaches to elderly social assistance reflects broader contestations over deservingness that manifest differently across Indonesia's diverse local contexts. As we will see in the case of Bintan, local constructions of elderly deservingness can take different forms, shaped by distinct political and institutional dynamics.

[136] Interview with LG18, 4 August 2022

6.4.2 Case Study 2: Bintan's Bantuan Langsung Tunai (BLT) Lansia

Figure 6.1 "Bintan Care for Elderly" envelope to provide cash transfer to the elderly

Source: Author's own documentation

In July 2023, I received a message from Ibu Nina[137] of the Social Affairs (Dinsos) office in Bintan District. She requested outputs from my fieldwork in Bintan in July 2022. Ibu Nina explained that the Bintan District is nominating the BLT Lansia program for a local innovation competition. To increase their points in the nomination, they need to demonstrate that external researchers have researched the program. Ibu Nina is an important member of the Bintan Dinsos Office, responsible for designing and implementing Bintan's BLT Lansia program. The following section will discuss why and how actors in Bintan consider the elderly to deserve social assistance.

Table 6.6 Key Features of BLT Lansia, Bintan

Criteria	"Non-Potential" elderly, based on local criteria
Coverage	4,200 (2021) 5,450 (2023), 5,068 (2024)
Benefit level	IDR 100,000 (AUD $10) / month
Distribution	Every four months (lump sum)

The key features of BLT Lansia include an IDR 100,000 (AUD 10) monthly benefit level with distribution every four months as reflected in Table 6.6. The Bintan government started in

[137] Not her real name.

2021, and in 2024, it distributed cash to 5,058 elderly people in the district. According to a Dinsos official, the distribution provides cash directly by gathering the elderly in sub-districts or village offices. The BLT Lansia also does not use the national government's poverty targeting database, DTKS, and develops its own "*lansia non-potensial"* or non-potential elderly criteria. While the Bintan government adopted the term "non-potential elderly", Dinsos Bintan came up with their own criteria and scoring. Bintan also aligned the disbursement with the Muslim festive season, such as the Eid celebration or before the fasting season for the Muslims, even though it did not have the same Meugang tradition as in Aceh.

Bintan's elderly assistance programs (BLT Lansia) emerged through an unexpected window of opportunity during the COVID-19 crisis. A Bintan Bappeda official explained the program's origins:

> Elderly assistance started in 2020 during COVID. The local government saw that the elderly were affected, so it finally initiated it through the 2020 budget revision. In 2021, we included it in the Bintan district's medium-term plan for 2021–2026, strengthening it in our Vision Mission (district strategy document) to accommodate and give attention to the elderly.[138]

Notably, Bintan introduced elderly assistance despite fiscal constraints. The district relies heavily on tourism revenue for its local income (*Pendapatan Asli Daerah or PAD*), and saw its budget severely reduced during the Pandemic. Yet the local government prioritised elderly assistance even under this financial pressure.[139]

Several factors led to the institutionalisation of Bintan's elderly social assistance. First, Bupati's high political commitment was crucial in establishing Bintan's elderly assistance program. Local officials in Bintan consistently highlighted former Bupati Apri Sujadi's particular attention to elderly welfare. As a Bappeda official noted: "We didn't have a study, but during the Pandemic, they (the elderly) were mostly affected. So, the elderly got attention. Our leader, *Bupati*, gave attention to the elderly."[140]

Further, *Bupati* Apri's high political commitment towards the elderly is part of his populist approach. As a populist leader, *Bupati* Apri used the *Blusukan*[141] (direct community visit), which shaped his understanding of the needs of the elderly. This *'blusukan'* revealed the

[138] Interview with LG8, 29 June 2022.
[139] Interview with LG8, 29 June 2022.
[140] Interview with LG8, 29 June 2022.
[141] *Blusukan* became a popular term to describe the activity of a political leader, such as the head of regions or president, who goes out to the community to meet the people. The term firstly became popular when President Jokowi became the Mayor of Solo and Governor of Jakarta, before he became the Indonesian President.

vulnerability of elderly residents living alone, leading to his first initiative – establishing *"Rumah Bahagia"* (Happy Home), a centre for the abandoned elderly.[142] This aligned with local government mandates under the 2014 Law to care for the abandoned elderly.

Second, *Bupati* Apri used the elderly assistance program as part of the *Bupati*'s re-election strategy[143]. The Head of Bappeda candidly acknowledged this political dimension: "… implicitly it is for political reasons… The idea of BLT was part of *Bupati's* vision and mission when he was going for his re-election."[144] However, this political investment in elderly social assistance continued beyond individual leadership when *Bupati* Apri was arrested for corruption in early 2022, and Vice Bupati Roby Kurniawan assumed leadership.[145]

Third, despite the changes in *Bupati,* the role of the local Social Affairs (Dinsos) office is crucial to shape the idea of deserving elderly and ensure the sustainability of the program. Under the interim *Bupati* Roby's leadership, BLT Lansia in Bintan grew from 4,200 beneficiaries in 2021 to 5,430 in 2023, with plans to reach 6,000 elderly in 2024.[146] This growth, however, required local officials, particularly in Dinsos, to navigate between new political priorities and existing bureaucratic constraints.

Dinsos officials play a crucial role in balancing political directions with administrative realities when implementing BLT Lansia. Under the leadership of Bupati Roby, he wanted to include low-ranking civil service pensions as recipients of Bintan BLT Lansia. As the Dinsos official in charge of the program, Ibu Nina worked to incorporate this new directive:

> In Bintan, for the pensioners who only earn IDR 800,000 (AUD 80) per month from their pension, we want to include them in the program… Pak Bupati (Roby) received feedback that low-ranking pensioners (civil servants) with an IDR 1,500,000 (AUD 150) monthly income deserve assistance. Pak Bupati wants the regulation to change.[147]

In our interview, she explained how she had to develop a new criterion to accommodate the Bupati's request to include low-pension civil servants in Bintan. Ibu Nina's experience reflects how local state officials actively shaped how elderly deservingness was defined and

[142] Interview with LG11, 29 June 2022.
[143] Bupati Apri Sujadi was Bupati in Bintan in 2016–2021, and he was re-elected for 2021–2024. However, in April 2021, he was convicted to five years in jail due to a corruption case on a customs quota for alcohol and cigarettes in the special region of Bintan.
[144] Interview with LG11, 29 June 2022.
[145] Roby Kurniawan started as acting Bupati in January 2021 before he officially became the Bupati in October 2022 to finish the district head term in 2024.
[146] WhatsApp communication with Bintan Social Affairs staff, February 2023
[147] Interview with LG12, 29 June 2022.

operationalised, often diverging from national approaches to create locally appropriate solutions.

Local state officials also had to come up with justifications for deciding eligibility criteria for the elderly. In Bintan, Dinsos officials used the term *"sama rasa, sama rata*" (equal feeling, equal rights) as a principle to justify why only one elderly person per household can be eligible for the BLT Lansia program. Ibu Nina explained how Bintan's BLT Lansia targets households, not individuals.

> The philosophy is that *sama rasa sama rata* (equal feeling, equal rights), with an improved PAD (district income), we hope that all the elderly can receive it, and we can cover all the elderly. But for now, one household, one elderly person.[148]

Most significantly, local officials deliberately diverted from the national government's targeting approaches. Ibu Nina explicitly rejected using the national poverty database (DTKS), explaining:

> When we discussed, we wanted to work on "ranah non-DTKS" (Non-DTKS area). We won't use DTKS as a basis if a person meets the program's criteria... We are worried that if we are based on DTKS, it is not *"aman"* (safe)[149]. They got paid for the first and second payments; they won't get paid for the third and fourth payments. It would be a pity for the elderly.[150]

Local officials' rejection of DTKS reflected practical and conceptual concerns about deservingness. Like their counterparts in other regions, Bintan's Dinsos officials witnessed DTKS's unreliability firsthand – beneficiaries would appear and disappear from the database between payment periods. The exclusion errors in DTKS have also created concern among Dinsos state officials, especially regarding the implementation of social assistance programs. More fundamentally, their approach to deservingness diverged from the national government's poverty-focused targeting. Instead of using economic criteria alone, Bintan's program prioritised "non-potential" elderly, regardless of economic status, as evidenced by their inclusion of low-ranking pensioners.

In summary, the evolution of BLT Lansia in Bintan reveals three key patterns in local social assistance innovation. First, local policy actors can strategically use crises like COVID-19 to introduce new programs or deliver electoral promises, even under fiscal constraints. Second,

[148] Interview LG12, 29 June 2022.
[149] The term 'safe' in this context refers to compliance with government audit requirements. The inconsistencies in the DTKS have resulted in audit findings against local social affairs offices, including in Bintan. These findings were triggered by instances of beneficiaries receiving concurrent social assistance from both national and sub-national programmes, which violates existing regulations
[150] Interview with LG12, 29 June 2022.

political leadership – particularly from *Bupatis* pursuing populist agendas – creates program initiation and expansion opportunities, including winning local elections. Third, local officials, especially in Dinsos, play a crucial role in translating political commitments into the operation of elderly social assistance by shaping definitions of deservingness. This case particularly demonstrates how notions of deservingness can evolve through political transitions – from the initial focus on "abandoned" elderly under the former *Bupati* to the current inclusion of low-pension civil servants under his successor. In the following section, we will see how notions of deserving elderly can also evolve to become less inclusive for the elderly.

6.4.3 Case Study 3: Badung's Bansos Lansia

The Badung district in Bali province has the highest PAD contribution (district-owned income) due to its significant tourism economy. A Bappenas official recommended that I look at the Badung district, as he described how the district introduced various generous social assistance programs, almost like a Scandinavian type of social policy[151]. *Bantuan Sosial Lansia (Bansos Lansia)*, or Elderly Social Assistance, is one of the social assistance programs that the Badung district introduced in 2018. He also commented, "The Dinsos office in Badung is the fanciest (*paling megah)*"[152]. When I arrived for my fieldwork in July 2022 in the Badung district, it was exactly as my respondent told me. The Badung district government complex consists of large buildings decorated with Balinese carvings. It was quite a contrast from the other two districts that I visited. However, I also found that due to COVID-19, the Badung district had not disbursed the elderly social assistance from 2020 until I did my fieldwork in 2022. In this section, I will discuss why the Badung district government introduced elderly social assistance and how the ideas of deservingness have evolved in Badung.

Badung district first introduced the Bansos Lansia in 2018 with simple criteria and a generous benefit. All 'non-potential elderly' above 72 years old were eligible to receive IDR 1,000,000 (AUD 100) monthly. Along the way, the Badung district started putting more criteria in place to reduce the number of beneficiaries, as reflected in Table 6.7.

[151] The Scandinavian countries' social policy is well known for its comprehensive social policy with universal access to its citizens.
[152] Interview with NG2, 25 November 2022

Table 6.7 Key features of elderly social assistance in Badung

Year	Number of beneficiaries	Key criteria	Status
2018	13,104	Above 72 or bedridden above 60 years old	disbursed
2019	16,301		disbursed
2020	15,349	Above 75 years (min stay in Badung for 5 years)	Not disbursed
2021	4,391	'Poor and vulnerable' using DTKS	Not disbursed

The main reason why the Badung district introduced the elderly social assistance was political. *Bupati* Giri Prasta introduced social assistance for elderly people as part of his populist policy, where the idea was introduced as an election promise for the 2016 election. Besides elderly social assistance, the *Bupati* also introduced several other Bansos programs – social assistance for family members who care for hospital patients 'bantuan social *penunggu pasien,* and 'death social assistance' (*jaminan kematian*) – if someone with Badung KTP died, the family would automatically receive district assistance.[153] This was part of the district head election campaign to win the 2016 election. Due to *Bupati* Giri Prasta's popularity, in December 2020, he won his re-election without political competition.[154]

Besides the *Bupati's* electoral objectives, religious and cultural beliefs in respecting the elderly shape the notions of deserving elderly in receiving social assistance. As the District Secretary explained: "It's a way to show our attention (*perhatian*) as well as giving respect (*penghormatan*). Also, we should educate our people to respect their parents."[155] However, this religious and cultural justification gave way to more restrictive approaches as local officials began to prioritise bureaucratic and fiscal concerns, leading them to impose increasingly stringent criteria that effectively redefined who deserved assistance.

Several factors led to the shift in the notions of deserving elderly. First, local officials are concerned about the growing fiscal burden of the elderly grant. Further, the unintended migration patterns alarmed local bureaucrats. The program's generous benefits attracted the

[153] Each family would receive IDR 10 million if a family member died. This is to cover for '*ngaben*' (Balinese cremation) that can cost at least IDR 10 million.
[154] The Bupati election was against a *'kotak kosong'* (or empty box) where there is no rival to compete in the election.
[155] Interview with LG7, 21 June 2022.

elderly from other districts in Bali and Java, leading to what Bappeda official Pak KW claimed was the “urbanisation to Badung”. He explained this trend:

> This is when we first experienced the “side effect”; Badung’s elderly population significantly increased from 14,000 to 16,000 and then became 20,000.[156]

Local bureaucrats, particularly in Bappeda, began viewing elderly migrants as an economic burden rather than deserving recipients. As Pak KW argued, “Economically, they are not productive. Why would we have non-productive people coming to Badung? So, we evaluated the policy.”[157] This shift in perspective led to significant policy restrictions, raising the age criteria from 72 to 75 years and introducing a five-year residency requirement.[158]

Second, the COVID-19 crisis provided another turning point in how Badung constructed elderly deservingness. Unlike Bintan, which prioritised elderly assistance during the Pandemic, Badung suspended its elderly social assistance program through “budget refocusing”. Pak KW explained that because of COVID-19, Badung’s district budget suffered as most of Badung’s income is from the tourism sector. As a result, the district instead prioritised tourism workers who, while not poor, had lost their incomes. As the District Secretary explained:

> With COVID, apart from those that are already in the data (recorded as poor), some just emerged and are affected; you can say they are not poor either physically; they still have a house but no income... We focus on handling COVID in the economic field and social safety nets.[159]

Badung's economic context shaped how local officials redefined deservingness during the COVID-19 crisis. With a poverty rate of only 2% (BPS, 2024) and an economy heavily dependent on tourism, local officials viewed tourism workers rather than the elderly as more deserving of assistance during the Pandemic. The district's traditional understanding of vulnerability through poverty became less relevant when tourism workers, typically not classified as poor but suddenly without income, emerged as a new vulnerable group. This shift reflected how local economic structures influenced deservingness; in a district where tourism drives the economy, those contributing to this sector were prioritised over traditionally vulnerable groups like the elderly.

[156] Interview with LG5, 24 June 2022
[157] Interview with LG5, 24 June 2022
[158] It is important to note that the Badung district has lower elderly rate compared to other districts in Bali Province. As the tourism jobs and industry is in Badung districts, those of working age in Bali will leave their districts to go to Badung and their elderly parents are left behind in the home districts.
[159] Interview with LG7, 21 June 2022.

The final transformation came through an audit requirement, which fundamentally altered the program's approach to the deserving elderly. Following *Badan Pemeriksa Keuangan* or BPK (Supreme Audit Agency) recommendations, Badung Dinsos shifted the program from universal coverage to poverty-targeted assistance using the national DTKS database. As Dinsos officials explained to me:

> From 2018 to 2020, we used the data we got from the '*klian*' (head of the sub-village in Bali), but along the way, as Dinsos, we are meant to be for 'the poor', we could not target everyone. Since 2021, we have used the DTKS. This is because Dinsos must target the poor. This is based on BPK findings.[160]

The above statement reflects how state officials in Badung were more concerned about audit compliance than ensuring the elderly in Badung receive social assistance. Dinsos officials acknowledged that adopting the national government DTKS for targeting beneficiaries would exclude many previously eligible elderly beneficiaries, yet they chose this approach to comply with audit requirements. For these officials, using DTKS represented a "safe option" to avoid future audit findings, even at the cost of reduced coverage. As one Dinsos official explained: "We want to ensure we are aligned with the BPK audit recommendation."[161] This prioritisation of audit compliance over program coverage reflects a common pattern in Indonesian bureaucratic practice, where officials often make policy decisions based on avoiding audit risks rather than maximising program effectiveness.

In summary, the Badung case illustrated how the ideas of "deserving elderly" can shift and change from the "deserving" to "undeserving elderly". The Badung elderly grant initially started as a universal social pension as part of the *Bupati's* populist strategy and political interests to win the local district election. Then, the elderly grant was deprioritised due to COVID-19, as there was a reduction in the district's income and budget, and other issues became more urgent crises. At the same time, the notions of deserving elderly shifted when the local state officials realised the unintended consequences of the elderly grant, which increased the number of elderly who migrated to Badung. The notions of deservingness also shifted again during the COVID-19 crisis, when social assistance was not targeted only for the "poor" but also for those affected by the crisis. It then further transformed to adopt the national government narrative to only the "poor and vulnerable" elderly who are deserving of elderly social assistance, and the neoliberal discourse of "effective and efficient" and the local state officials' interests to follow the audit recommendations became the key interests that reduced the coverage of elderly social assistance significantly.

[160] Interview with LG6, 21 June 2022.
[161] Interview with LG6, 21 June 2022.

This section has demonstrated how local dynamics influence the institutionalisation of elderly social assistance in three districts. It also illustrates how local state officials shape the notions of deserving elderly, leading to a different pattern of inclusion or exclusion in social assistance programs. In the next section, I will summarise my analysis by discussing the factors shaping notions of deserving elderly from both local and national levels to understand the pattern of inclusion and exclusion in social assistance.

6.5 Discussion: Critical dynamics shaping ideas of the deserving for the elderly

This chapter's discussion demonstrates how specific factors led to different levels of commitment, shaping the pattern of inclusion and exclusion in elderly social assistance. Drawing on Leisering's (2018) work on deservingness and social protection policy, we see how the government formulates policies based on underlying ideas of deservingness. In analysing different policy outcomes in elderly social assistance, we see the combination of narratives, actors and networks, and different interests that create policy space and influence outcomes (Schmitz & Scoones, 2019, p.63).

6.5.1 Religious and cultural norms of respecting the elderly

At the national level, Indonesia's government narrative regarding elderly social assistance reflects the tension between state and family responsibilities in caring for the elderly. This tension is formally codified in Government Regulation No. 43 of 2004, which explicitly acknowledges cultural expectations about family responsibility. Article 35 states that social protection efforts must be preceded by "counselling and social guidance so that individuals, families, groups, and social organisations/community institutions have social awareness and responsibility as well as concern for improving the social welfare of the elderly" (Republic of Indonesia, 2004). This provision reveals the government's underlying assumption that elderly care is primarily the responsibility of families and communities, with state intervention reserved for cases where these traditional support systems have failed.

For instance, the ASLUT program's focus on "abandoned elderly" reflects these deep-rooted cultural and religious expectations regarding filial piety and respect for elders that are embedded in state ideology. The regulation further specifies that social protection is intended for "non-potential abandoned elderly" (*lanjut usia tidak potensial terlantar*), explicitly positioning government assistance as a last resort when family and community support is absent. Similarly, incorporating elderly coverage into PKH symbolically "returns the elderly to the family."[162]. This approach aligns with Indonesia's broader aging policy, where Lestari et al.

[162] Interview NG1, 20 November 2021.

(2022) identify ongoing tension between "public responsibility" and "family obligations". Lestari and colleagues' observation on Indonesia's institutional care for the elderly reflects this tension:

> The tension is resolved by drawing on a cultural construction of ageing with its emphasis on intergenerational obligation and the familial duty of care to respected elders. Government institutional care is limited to those older people who do not have family or are deemed to be 'neglected'. (Lestari et al., 2022, p.2058)

This cultural expectation of intergenerational obligations and family duty to care for the elderly influences the government's role in providing services for the elderly. As Lestari et al. (2022) also found, the government's approach to older people's care in Indonesia, such as providing "residential care" only to the elderly who are "neglected" and those who do not receive familial care.

However, while the national government has unwritten expectations that elderly parents are being cared for by their families, data shows that it is not always the case. Based on the 2022 BPS elderly data, 7.25% of the elderly live alone and 20.85% live with their partner. Furthermore, most of the elderly who live by themselves are women. Hence, having gaps in social assistance for the elderly also creates gender inequality implications and suggests that the Indonesian government has not considered gender aspects in designing social assistance programs, as pointed out in Chapter Five.

The tension between state and family responsibilities manifests differently at the districts in this study. First, local policy actors strategically reframe cultural expectations to create complementary rather than competing roles between family and state. Rather than positioning government assistance as replacing family obligations, local officials present it as enabling families to fulfil their traditional duties better. The Aceh Jaya case illustrates this approach, where officials frame ASLURETI as helping elderly parents maintain their dignity by contributing to *Meugang* celebrations when their children lack sufficient resources. Pak Azhar's rationale aligned with the global idea of old-age pensions, where the main rationale for providing cash transfers for the elderly is to increase their autonomy and dignity out of respect for the elderly (Leisering, 2018). Further, social pensions are popular in the Global South as the elderly share their benefits with grandchildren (Leisering, 2018), leading to poverty reduction overall.

The centrality of religion in Indonesian society provides local political leaders with powerful justification for social policy initiatives. In Bintan and Badung, the local state officials emphasised that elderly social assistance is a form of 'honouring' the elderly based on

religious values, such as Islam in Bintan and Hinduism in Badung. At the same time, Aceh Jaya government distributes elderly social assistance during the *Meugang* festive period. While religious and cultural values influence the dynamics of elderly social assistance, the next section will examine how the social investment paradigm influences notions of "deserving elderly" in social assistance.

6.5.2 The social investment hegemony: productive and unproductive elderly

The social investment paradigm has significantly shaped Indonesia's social policy discourse, particularly affecting policies related to the elderly and aging. The construct of the elderly as either "productive" or "non-productive" reflects the state's preference for productivity discourse. This productivity discourse manifests in national and local policies with different implications at each level. At the national level, emphasising elderly productivity justifies limited social assistance.

The national government's approach to the elderly policy clearly reflects this emphasis on productivity. The 2021 President Regulation No. 88 on the National Strategy for the Elderly Population explicitly frames aging as a potential burden that requires productive solutions: *"If the issue of aging is not handled properly, it will potentially burden the State. The State needs to prepare early for a productive elderly population."* (p.2) While the regulation mentions improving "basic rights and inclusiveness" and strengthening social protection, it primarily emphasises "capacity and productivity" (Presidential Regulation No. 88/2021 on the National Strategy for Elderly Population, p.2).

This productivity discourse can justify limiting state support for the elderly. As Lestari et al. (2022) note, Indonesia adopted a 'successful ageing' discourse that emphasises individual responsibilities for welfare (Lestari et al., 2022, p.2060). A senior academic from the University of Indonesia[163] who researches elderly issues observes that this approach leads the government to expect elderly individuals to "work till they drop" rather than expanding social protection. This policy stance overlooks the reality that most elderly Indonesians work in the informal sector and cannot afford to contribute to social insurance.

The emphasis on productivity particularly disregards the economic circumstances of elderly Indonesians. Statistics show that 50% of the elderly Indonesians work primarily to meet basic needs (Lestari et al., 2022). This necessity to work is even more pronounced in rural areas, 63.34%, compared to the elderly in urban areas at 47.02% (BPS, 2023).

[163] Interview with RAT3, 7 February 2022.

Local governments interpret this productivity discourse differently. In Badung, officials use 'productivity' to exclude certain elderly from assistance, particularly questioning whether "unproductive" elderly migrants deserve support. Bintan takes a different approach, incorporating productivity into its targeting criteria through a "non-potential" scoring system that prioritises those deemed least able to be productive. These contrasting local interpretations show how the productivity discourse can restrict or enable access to social assistance, depending on local policy choices.

6.5.3 The role of local policy entrepreneurs: navigating political, institutional and practical interests

Local policy entrepreneurs, particularly officials in Bappeda and Dinsos, are influential in shaping how deservingness is constructed in elderly social assistance across different districts. The existing literature on social pension development has primarily focused on the role of international actors and external policy experts in social pension advocacy (Leisering, 2018). However, in these case studies, district-level public servants emerge as key policy entrepreneurs who generate narratives of deservingness and establish program criteria. These local officials lead policy debates, advocate for change, build coalitions (Lavers and Hickey, 2015), and develop policy design and formulation (Ulriksen, 2019). Unlike the national state officials at the national level who belong to epistemic communities as part of their US qualifications, local policy entrepreneurs tend not to belong to a particular epistemic community.

In their role, policy entrepreneurs must balance competing political and institutional interests. Similar to national political actors who target children of poor families as part of their populist strategy, local leaders such as the *Bupati* introduced elderly social assistance within their populist approach. Drawing on Moffit and Torney's definition (cited in Jawad et al., 2021, p.272), populism functions as a "political style" that emphasises performative gestures and symbolism over ideologies (Jawad et al., 2021). This performative gesture of providing direct cash assistance for the elderly is part of a broader electoral politics strategy, such as winning a local election or boosting the political career of local politicians, such as Pak Azhar in Aceh Jaya. However, as the Badung case illustrated, the populist strategy does not always lead to the sustainability of elderly social assistance. It must also align with local bureaucratic interests or issues that policy entrepreneurs deem important.

Three key factors influence how these local policy entrepreneurs construct and maintain notions of deservingness towards elderly social assistance. First, they must link notions of deservingness with critical local issues. For example, in Aceh Jaya, the high poverty rate

provided justification for local state officials to continue the elderly social assistance. As we can see in Table 6.8, Aceh Jaya has the highest poverty rate compared to Bintan and Badung. In contrast, Badung's low poverty rate means poverty reduction is not a primary concern. Instead, during the COVID-19 crisis, Badung's district government prioritised supporting tourism workers, as the district's economy heavily depended on the tourism industry, which was severely affected by the Pandemic. Hence, the elderly social assistance program was de-prioritised while the government provided temporary cash transfers to tourism workers. This example demonstrates how local officials, acting as policy entrepreneurs, play a crucial role in either maintaining or shifting deservingness narratives, which ultimately leads to different policy outcomes for the elderly.

Table 6.8: Elderly profile in sub-districts and national level

	Total elderly	Percentage of the elderly of the total population	Poverty rate	Life expectancy rate (years)
Aceh Jaya (based on 2021 data)	Elderly (60 +) total 7,570 Elderly (70+) total 3,200	The elderly 60+ is 8% of the total population	13.23% in 2021 (March) 12.51% in 2022 (March)	67.40 (2022)
Bintan (based on 2022 data)	Elderly (60+) 13,349 Elderly (65+) 8,089	The elderly 60+ is 7.9% of the total population	6.36% (2021)	70.38
Badung (based on 2023 data)	Elderly (60+) total 67,305 70+ 26,759 75+ 14,259	Elderly 60+ is 12.2% Elderly 70+ 4.86%	2.02% (2020) 2.62% (2021) 2.53% (2022)	75.5 (2022)
National	Elderly (60+) 18.6 million elderly (2020)	10.82%	9.5% in 2022	72.14

Source: BPS, 2023; BPS, Kabupaten Aceh Jaya, 2022; BPS, Kabupaten Badung, 2024; BPS, Kabupaten Bintan, 2023

Second, local policy entrepreneurs must strategically respond to changes in political leadership that affect how deservingness is conceptualised. The case of Bintan illustrates this dynamic clearly when the new *Bupati* sought to extend assistance to low-level civil service pensioners. Bintan's social affairs had to create a rationale to support Bupati's political interests while at the same time ensuring that Dinsos as an institution complies with regulations. Dinsos officials demonstrated their entrepreneurial role by carefully balancing multiple interests: the *Bupati*'s political agenda, their institutional responsibility to maintain the

program, and the need for regulatory compliance. They achieved this balance by revising the local regulations on Bansos Lansia.[164] Similarly, in Aceh Jaya, Bappeda proactively established local regulations to ensure the continuity of the ASLURETI program even with the leadership changes.[165]

Third, while the capacity of local policy entrepreneurs is critical, it may not lead to the sustainability of elderly social assistance programs. Fenwick and Rennó (2023) define policy capacity as "the set of skills and resources, or competencies and capabilities, at individual, organisational and systemic levels − necessary to perform a policy's functions." Their research on Brazil's Conditional Cash Transfer program demonstrates how strong policy capacity enabled bureaucratic actors to maintain program resilience despite political and economic challenges (Fenwick & Rennó, 2023).

The case studies in this chapter, however, reveal that local policy entrepreneurs' limited capacity does not necessarily constrain program inclusiveness. In Aceh Jaya, despite being relatively low in human and budgetary resources, local officials successfully maintained the universal targeting approach of the ASLURETI program. Conversely, policy entrepreneurs in the Badung district, despite having access to greater human resources and financial capacity, ultimately reduced the scope of their elderly pension grant. Following the BPK recommendation, they shifted from a generous universal grant to targeting only "the poor".

These contrasting cases reveal how local policy entrepreneurs can work creatively within their capacity constraints. The Aceh Jaya officials demonstrate that commitment to inclusive elderly social assistance can overcome their limited capacity. At the same time, the Badung case shows that greater capacity does not automatically translate to a more inclusive program.

Overall, this discussion has demonstrated how the combination of narratives, actors and networks, and different interests shape notions of deservingness in elderly social assistance policy spaces, as suggested by Schmitz and Scoones (2019). At the national level, dominant narratives around family responsibility and productivity have narrowed how deservingness is constructed, leading to limited state support for the elderly. This narrative, reinforced through the social investment paradigm's focus on "productive elderly" and cultural expectations of family care, has created a restricted definition of deserving elderly, primarily those who are "abandoned" or "neglected" by their families.

[164] Interview LG 12, 29 June 2022.
[165] Interview LG 17, 4 August 2022.

However, the sub-national case studies reveal how local policy entrepreneurs actively reconstruct notions of deservingness through strategic narrative building. Local policy entrepreneurs in *Bappeda* and *Dinsos* proved crucial in translating the different narratives into policy outcomes. Their effectiveness depends on navigating different interests: aligning political priorities with critical local issues, adapting to leadership changes and working within capacity constraints. What makes local policy entrepreneurs different from the national ones is that local policy entrepreneurs do not need to belong to a particular epistemic community. The case demonstrates varying outcomes in how deservingness is defined: Aceh Jaya's policy entrepreneurs expanded deservingness through universal targeting by connecting elderly assistance to poverty reduction and cultural traditions; Bintan's officials broadened deservingness criteria to include low-level civil service pensioners while maintaining program sustainability; while in Badung competing interests narrowed the definition of deservingness to focus only on poor elderly despite having greater fiscal and human resources capacity.

6.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has navigated into the complex landscape of elderly social assistance in Indonesia, exploring the dynamics of deservingness and the multifaceted influences that shape policy decisions. The examination of the national and sub-national levels, including Aceh Jaya, Bintan, and Badung, shows two crucial factors that shape the idea of deserving and undeserving elderly in social assistance programs: First, the importance of establishing and maintaining the narrative of deservingness, either by sociocultural values or social investment paradigm. Second, the role of policy actors in balancing different competing interests, such as bureaucratic, political and practical interests.

At the national level, the social investment hegemony and existing cultural expectations dominate the discourse used in social protection to maintain the status quo of limited state support for the elderly. The elderly are expected to be 'productive' as long as they can to ensure that they do not become a burden on the State. The notions of 'deserving' elderly also reflect the hegemonic ideas in broader social protection discourse, which is framed around the econometric measurement of poverty instead of recognising the elderly as a vulnerable population group.

In contrast, at the local level, the cultural expectations of families providing care for the elderly allow for a policy space for local governments to occupy by prioritising the elderly in social assistance. Local policy entrepreneurs, particularly in Bappeda and Dinsos, have demonstrated their capacity to reframe cultural expectations and navigate complex political

landscapes. Each district presents distinct patterns: Aceh Jaya linking elderly support to their cultural traditions, such as *Meugang* and their poverty reduction agenda; Bintan adapting to new political priorities; and Badung illustrating how competing interests can reshape program scope despite available resources.

In sum, this chapter demonstrates that the construction of deservingness in elderly social assistance is not monolithic but is shaped by the complex interplay of social investment hegemony, socio-cultural values, institutional interests, and policy entrepreneurs' interests. The analysis of national and district cases reveals how these factors can either constrain or enable more inclusive approaches to elderly social assistance. Understanding these dynamics is crucial as Indonesia develops its elderly social assistance programmes. While creating more inclusive elderly social assistance is complex, requiring careful navigation of multiple interests and contexts, this understanding can inform better policy design that responds to the diverse needs of Indonesia's ageing population.

Chapter Seven: Unpacking Indonesia's Notion of "Deserving Poor" in Social Assistance Programs

> "The notion of deservingness operates within a broader social context that gives it meaning and determines its consequences. The concept is inextricably linked to common assessments of why people end up on the bottom of the economic ladder, how many people are there, how long they stay, and why certain populations are disproportionately represented." (Watkins-Hayes & Kovalsky, 2017)

7.1 Introduction

Although there has been a massive expansion of social assistance programs in Indonesia in the last twenty years, the pattern of inclusion and exclusion towards different vulnerable groups has been uneven. International agencies such as the World Bank (2020) and OECD (2019) have emphasised how "poor families with children" are mostly entitled to social assistance programs. However, other vulnerable population groups in Indonesia, including the elderly or people with disability, lack entitlement to social assistance.

The central question that this thesis investigates is how notions of deservingness influence the pattern of inclusion and exclusion in social assistance. Building on Leisering's (2018) conceptualisation of exclusion as a lack of entitlement for different groups, the empirical chapters demonstrate that entitlement is a multi-faceted concept constructed through interactions between diverse actors and competing ideas. The lens of deservingness reveals how these contested ideas interact and evolve, influencing the institutionalisation of social assistance programs within Indonesia's social protection system.

This chapter synthesises critical themes emerging from the case studies, which examined social assistance policies targeting different population groups, such as children, women, and the elderly, across various levels in Indonesia. By analysing the interplay of socio-cultural values, transnational ideas, and political and institutional interests, this thesis reveals the complex dynamics that shape the construction of target groups within social assistance programs and notions of deservingness.

Building on the analysis of policy actors and ideas that shape social assistance programs, this chapter traces the evolution of the notions of deservingness in Indonesian social policy. The main argument of this thesis is that the construct of deservingness is not static, but dynamic and contested. The complex interplay between socio-cultural values, externally driven policy paradigms and state officials' bureaucratic, political and practical interests co-produce deservingness. Policy entrepreneurs can effectively shape the poverty discourse and mobilise

different ideas of deservingness to align with political and bureaucratic interests. This, in turn, has resulted in distinct patterns of inclusion and exclusion within social assistance programs towards children, women and the elderly. At the national level, "liberal economic technocrats" dominated the poverty discourse underpinning ideas in social assistance programs. This poverty discourse often renders invisible the structural determinants of poverty and the diverse experiences of vulnerability. Policy actors navigate different challenges at the local level, balancing competing populist politics, institutional interests, and locally driven issues, which can lead to different outcomes for social assistance programs for different target groups.

This chapter addresses the research question, exploring the underlying ideas shaping Indonesia's social assistance programs and how these reflect notions of deservingness. I began by examining the convergence of socio-cultural norms and the dominant social investment paradigm that led to the institutionalisation of a residual approach to social assistance. Next, I analyse the role of national policy actors and the dominant coalition, demonstrating how their understanding of poverty influences deservingness within social assistance programs. I also discussed the limited influence of civil society actors at the national level. Finally, I turn to the sub-national level to examine how local dynamics influence sub-national policy actors that shape a distinct understanding of deservingness.

7.2 Convergence of socio-cultural values and the social investment paradigm

This section addresses the first research question: What are the underlying ideas in Indonesia's social assistance programs, and how do they reflect notions of deservingness among different target groups? The dominant ideas of deservingness in social assistance are a convergence between religious, gender and family norms and values with the hegemonic influence of the social investment paradigm. The social investment paradigm reinforces a productivist framing of social assistance, defining who is "deserving" based on their perceived potential for economic productivity and limiting a rights-based approach to social protection.

7.2.1 Underpinning socio-cultural values

In Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority nation, Islamic values significantly influence ideas of deservingness. The concept of *fakir miskin,* emphasising the deservingness of the poorest to receive *Zakat* (almsgiving), is deeply ingrained in social welfare policy, as discussed in Chapter Four. This is evident in the Constitution's mandate for state care of "*fakir miskin dan anak terlantar"* (the destitute and abandoned children). President Jokowi's 2021 strategy to eliminate extreme poverty[166] further reinforces this focus on targeting the "poorest",

[166] Presidential Instruction no. 4 year 2022 on acceleration of extreme poverty elimination.

justifying Indonesia's residual approach to social assistance. According to a senior official in TNP2K, President Jokowi wanted to leave a legacy, and addressing extreme poverty was more "doable."[167]

The prioritisation of children for assistance, whether from the community or the state, Islamic ideas of orphan children as deserving of assistance have long been a part of Indonesian society, as illustrated in Chapter Four. The tradition of Muslims channelling *Zakat* to orphans is deeply ingrained. Chapter Four illustrated how one of the reasons that CCT targeting 'children of poor families' can be institutionalised and more accepted than the idea of child grants is that it aligns both with the idea of *fakir miskin* and orphans. The child-grant model that does not use poverty targeting and unconditional support could not gain traction nationally, as it is also not aligned with the socio-cultural values of "deserving children".

Religious values play a significant role at the subnational level, especially concerning the idea of the elderly as deserving. As illustrated in Chapter 6, in Aceh Jaya, local officials utilised the cultural significance of *Meugang* (Islamic tradition before the Eid holiday) to justify elderly social assistance. While in Badung and Bintan, respect for the elderly – a core value in both Islam and Hinduism – underpins the prioritisation of this group.

Second, religious values also intersect and shape gender norms, influencing the inclusion of women in social assistance. As illustrated in Chapter Five, "poor women" are deemed deserving primarily as mothers. The construct of women as "mothers" aligns with the rise of Islamic conservatism in Indonesia during the post-Reformasi period (Nisa, 2023). As Chapter Five discussed, women became more deserving of social assistance in their "reproductive" role, while their productive role was overlooked. These gender norms are influenced by more conservative religious values, also aligned with Indonesia's nationalist gender ideology of "State *Ibuism"* (Hyunanda et al., 2021; Suryakusuma, 2011). Women's entitlement linked to their family's entitlement reflects a deservingness construct of women's identity as "good mothers and wives" (Yuda & Rezza, 2021).

The construct of women in Indonesia's broader poverty reduction and social assistance policies reflects deeply ingrained gender norms influenced by religious values. As illustrated in Chapter Five, this is particularly evident in the national government's focus on micro-finance programs targeting women, which further illustrates that women are primarily responsible for care work, with economic activity as a secondary role. This narrow view of women's societal

[167] Interview with NG8, 5 April 2022.

roles significantly affects their well-being and economic security. Government policies in social assistance overlook the precarity of women in their productive role, especially as “informal sector workers”.

This particular construct of women, focusing predominantly on their reproductive role, overlooks the double burden faced by women living in poverty. These women often must simultaneously manage both reproductive and productive responsibilities. Moreover, this perspective perpetuates women’s vulnerability within the informal sector. While government policies such as micro-finance programs encourage them to engage in economic activities, social policy lacks support for their unpaid caregiving responsibilities and specific needs as informal sector workers. As I illustrated in Chapter Five, women in the informal sector face limited social protection options. The current social protection system expects informal sector workers, including women, to contribute to social insurance programs they most likely cannot afford, further exacerbating their economic precarity. How social policy constructs women is also linked to the broader family norms reflected in the outdated 1974 Indonesian Marriage Law, which situates men as the heads of households and women as housewives.

Third, family norms and expectations also significantly shape deservingness within Indonesian social assistance, as illustrated in both Chapters Five and Six. In Chapter Six, I illustrated how, at a national level, the ASLUT program’s focus on elderly individuals abandoned and neglected by their families reflects a residual approach, where the state intervenes only when the family support system fails. This approach is not only in social assistance programs but also in the solutions of institutional care for the elderly (as reflected in Lestari et al., 2022).

However, the sub-national elderly grant program challenges the national narrative. The Aceh Jaya case study demonstrates how local policy actors strategically use family norms to create policy space for local elderly social assistance. By framing the program as a means to enable elderly parents to share benefits with their families during Meugang, local officials tapped into existing cultural practices to garner support for the initiative. This approach acknowledges the reality of widespread poverty in the region, where many adult children struggle to provide for elderly parents. It positions the state as a facilitator for intergenerational support. This narrative of family sharing through social assistance resonates with the popularity of elderly grants in other developing regions (Leisering, 2018), particularly in Africa, where social pensions are often seen as contributing to broader poverty reduction goals.

This section demonstrates the profound influence of socio-cultural values, including religious beliefs, gender norms and family expectations, on the construction of deservingness in social

assistance. These values are not static but interact dynamically with policy paradigms, shaping who is considered deserving and how assistance is provided. In the next section, we will explore how the dominant social investment paradigm intersects with these socio-cultural values, further influencing the landscape of social assistance in Indonesia.

7.2.2 The dominant social investment paradigm

While socio-cultural values influence the underpinning ideas of deserving social assistance, they must also align with the country's dominant policy paradigm. In the empirical chapters, I have illustrated how an externally driven policy paradigm, social investment, dominates Indonesia's social policy discourse. This section explores how this paradigm, promoted by international organisations such as the World Bank, embraced and institutionalised by Indonesian policymakers, emphasising human capital development and future-oriented outcomes, shapes the construction of deservingness in social assistance. I argue that the social investment paradigm reinforces a productivist framing of social assistance, defining who is "deserving" based on their perceived potential for economic productivity and limiting a rights-based approach to social protection.

The social investment paradigm's focus on human capital aligns with human capital theory, which states that investing in individuals' skills and knowledge enhances their productivity and economic development. The paradigm views human capital investments by the state and families as crucial for the future knowledge-based economy (Jenson, 2010, p.77). International development agencies like the World Bank introduced the social investment paradigm to developing countries in response to the social consequences of Washington Consensus policies (Cook, 2017; Mahon, 2019).

The Indonesian government adopted the social investment paradigm and focused its social policy intervention on children, especially those in the poorest households. As illustrated in Chapter Four, the Indonesian government's prioritisation of conditional cash transfer programs like PKH and school stipend programs for children of poor families exemplifies this emphasis on future productivity. Policymakers see these programs targeting children as investments in children's human capital, with the expectation that they will increase economic returns in the future. However, this emphasis on productivity reinforces a productivist framing of deservingness, where individuals are valued primarily for their potential contribution to economic growth (Jenson, 2010; Papadopoulos & Velázquez Leyer, 2016). This framing is evident in the exclusion of groups considered "unproductive", such as the elderly and "vulnerable children", as reflected in Chapters Six and Four, which highlight the limited social assistance available for these groups despite their vulnerabilities.

The social investment paradigm's emphasis on productivity also influences policy towards the elderly. In Indonesia's demographic context, where most of the population is of working age, political elites prioritise policies for children and the working-age population. The discourse around strategies for the elderly also reflects the social investment hegemony, with terms like "productive elderly" becoming increasingly common, such as in the 2021 Presidential Decree on the National Strategy for the Elderly, as discussed in Chapter Six. The findings from this study on how social assistance programs construct the elderly corroborate Lestari et al.'s (2022, p.2057) studies on regional aging policy in Indonesia, where the policies at the regional level used the "successful aging" discourse, reflecting a neoliberal emphasis on individual responsibility. This discourse contrasts with the reality that many elderly Indonesians continue to work out of necessity due to limited state support.

In contrast, despite sharing a similar productivist framing and adopting the social investment paradigm, Japan and Korea have prioritised social investment for the elderly (Peng, 2014). Peng (2014) highlighted how, despite initially focusing on a productive population such as those working-age groups, structural factors such as the aging population, as well as an ideational change, have led Japan and Korea to go beyond the "productive" population groups using the "social inclusion" discourse. However, this "social inclusion" discourse has not been adopted in the Indonesian context to extend social protection to vulnerable groups like the elderly.

The social investment paradigm's future-oriented nature, focusing on long-term outcomes rather than immediate poverty alleviation (Jenson, 2010), also shapes the design and implementation of social assistance programs. This is evident in the preference for CCT, which ties benefits to specific behaviours like school attendance and health checkups, over unconditional programs like BLT discussed in Chapter Four. The narrative of breaking intergenerational poverty through investments in children has also been supported by numerous impact evaluations with the World Bank and other economists (Cahyadi et al., 2020). This aligned with De Sardan's observation that proponents of CCT focus on generating studies to measure the positive outcomes of CCT and downplay the issues and shortcomings of the approach (De Sardan, 2020, p.45)

The social investment paradigm has implications for how women are constructed in social policy. The emphasis on human capital development and economic participation (Fleckenstein et al., 2021) has led the Indonesian government to focus on integrating women into the market

system, as evidenced by the increasing number of microfinance programs targeting women. However, this approach often neglects the gendered division of labour and the burden of unpaid care work that many women bear. As Chapter Six discusses, the government's focus on women as "entrepreneurs" within the PKH program overlooks the need for comprehensive social protection that addresses both their productive and reproductive roles, echoing critiques of the social investment perspective in the European context (Cantillon & Van Lancker, 2013)

However, the social investment paradigm is not monolithic. Chapter Four discusses the social investment paradigm as a polysemic discourse with different interpretations and applications (Jenson, 2010). This is evident in the World Bank and UNICEF's varying approaches to social assistance for children, as discussed in Chapter Four. While both organisations operate within the social investment framework, their differing policy models targeting children highlight the flexibility and potential contradictions inherent in this paradigm. This is the case despite UNICEF being an agency that has a mandate to promote the UNCRC, advocates for rights-based social protection policies, and hence rejects the idea of the World Bank's residual approach to social assistance. As Chapter Four illustrated, UNICEF used broader nutrition objectives to introduce the idea of child grants in Sabang instead of framing social assistance as children's rights. In the next section, I will briefly discuss the limitations of rights discourse in Indonesia's social assistance.

7.2.3 The limitations of the rights discourse in social assistance

Understanding the dominance of the social investment paradigm and the influence of socio-cultural values led to Indonesia's dependency on a residual social protection policy. This led to the limited use of a rights-based approach to social protection in the social policy discourse. Existing literature has highlighted how socio-economic rights, particularly those related to health and education, are more readily accepted as they contribute to economic growth (Rosser & van Diermen, 2016). However, rights to social assistance in Indonesia remain contested (Rosser & van Diermen, 2016). Further, studies on Indonesia's welfare system highlighted how Indonesia's social protection is not based on citizenship rights but on patrimonialism (Yuda, 2019).

In Indonesia, there are embedded notions that rights ("*hak")* often go hand-in-hand with obligations *("kewajiban")* as highlighted by Gibbings (2016, p.6) in her works with street vendors and eviction in Indonesia. She reflected that *"hak dan kewajiban*" (rights and obligations) was a New Order legacy where individual rights must serve collective interests. Rights and obligations are the main frameworks in Indonesia's Constitution and legal frameworks. As reflected in Chapter Four, this strengthens the appeal of conditional cash

transfers like PKH, which require recipients to fulfil certain obligations, compared to unconditional cash transfers like BLT. Further, this idea of you having to fulfil your obligations before getting your rights is in the national programs and at the local level, such as in the child grant in Sabang. As reflected in Chapter Four, despite UNICEF introducing the idea of an unconditional child grant, the Sabang government added conditions for bringing children to the health care centre. It also explains the difficulties in advocating for elderly grants, especially at the national level, as conditions cannot be imposed on the elderly to fulfil their obligation.

This tension between rights and obligations is further complicated by Indonesia's weak concept of national-state identity, as argued by Mas'udi and Lay's (2018). The research findings demonstrate how local and cultural identities often supersede national citizenship in determining social assistance deservingness, especially at the sub-national level. For instance, in Provincial Papua, deservingness is framed primarily through Papuan children's Indigenous identity, while in Aceh, the centrality of Meugang reflects the dominance of religious and ethnic affiliations. This fragmented citizenship framework, combined with the prevailing rights-obligations dynamic, creates significant barriers to mobilising human rights discourse in Indonesia's social protection policy at the local level.

The limited role of rights discourse in social assistance leaves vulnerable groups like children, women, and the elderly without comprehensive coverage. As the empirical chapters have illustrated, children are only entitled to assistance if they belong to "poor households," and women's entitlement is linked to their families. The elderly are only eligible under specific conditions.

This section has demonstrated the convergence of socio-cultural values and the social investment paradigm, which provides the ideational framework within which policy actors operate. However, these ideas do not translate automatically into policy. Instead, different groups of policy actors interpret, negotiate, and operationalise these ideas in ways that align with their interests and institutional positions. The following section examines how various policy actors, particularly a dominant coalition of economic technocrats, shape ideas of deservingness in Indonesia's social assistance programs.

7.3 The role of policy actors in shaping ideas of deservingness

Building on the analysis of socio-cultural values and the social investment paradigm, this section explores the role of policy actors in shaping ideas of deservingness in social assistance programs. We now turn to answer the second research question: "How do different

policy actors influence the construction of target groups in social assistance programs?" I argue that a dominant coalition of "liberal economic technocrats" within the national government bureaucracy shapes Indonesia's predominant poverty discourse and promotes a residual approach to social assistance. This coalition's approach prioritises econometric measures of poverty and a residual model in social assistance, allowing the exclusion of vulnerable groups.

7.3.1 Powerful technocratic coalition and the dominant poverty discourse

Existing literature on the politics of social protection reform has predominantly focused on the role of international policy actors in shaping social assistance programs, especially in the Global South. Scholars such as Hickey et al. (2020) and Devereux (2023) have highlighted the significant influence of "international consultants" and agencies as "policy entrepreneurs" in Sub-Saharan Africa. These studies often portray international actors as the primary drivers of policy innovation and design, while domestic "technocrats and bureaucrats" are typically characterised as focusing primarily on implementation (Devereux, 2023).

However, a more recent scholarship has challenged this dichotomy between international and domestic actors. For instance, it emphasises that the "policy entrepreneurs" category can encompass both international and domestic actors, including civil servants and national policy experts (Ulriksen, 2019). This broader conceptualisation acknowledges the agency and influence of domestic actors in shaping social protection policies. In Latin America, researchers like Fenwick and Rennó (2023) have shifted attention to bureaucratic actors' crucial role in ensuring social assistance programs' sustainability. Their work on Brazil's Program Bolsa Familia (PBF) demonstrates how domestic bureaucrats have been instrumental in maintaining policy continuity despite dynamic political landscapes and changes in political leadership.

While these studies have significantly advanced our understanding of policy actors in social protection reform, more research is needed to examine the specific role of domestic technocrats in shaping both the conceptualisation of poverty and the design of social assistance programs, particularly in the Southeast Asian context.

This thesis addresses this gap by examining the case of Indonesia, where I argue that a powerful coalition of domestic technocrats has played a pivotal role in shaping the country's social assistance landscape. While existing literature on Indonesia's social protection reform has highlighted the influential role of a powerful transnational agency such as the World Bank

(Kwon & Kim, 2015; Peck & Theodore, 2015b; Sumarto, 2021a), recent research shows that the Indonesian government has taken greater ownership of its social policy agenda and is in the "driving seat" (Kaasch & Wilmsen, 2024).

Building on these insights, this study examines who within the Indonesian government drives this policy agenda. The findings reveal that state officials in Bappenas and TNP2K, as economists and public policy experts, have the mandate and role to design and formulate these programs. Their connections to international organisations and think tanks further strengthen their influence by providing technical expertise and reinforcing a particular approach to poverty conceptualisation that influences the design of social assistance programs.

At the national level, senior bureaucratic officials in Bappenas and TNP2K have been instrumental in institutionalising Indonesia's national social assistance programs. Existing literature has often used the term "technocrats" to refer to senior officials in these two agencies (Datta et al., 2014; Wilmsen et al., 2017). Ho (2020, p.615) describes "technocrats" as "bureaucrats with specialised expertise", whose professional training shapes their ideologies and policy solutions. In looking at their role as the "technocrats", I draw on the classification of types of coalitions that Rosser and Murphy (2023) introduced in Southeast Asia social welfare policy. As I discussed in Chapter Three, one of the coalitions of policy actors they identified was the "technocratic element" coalition. In Rosser and Murphy's classification of the "technocratic element", besides government technocrats, they also included international financial institutions such as the World Bank and bilateral donors such as the Australian government's DFAT.

As discussed in Chapter Four, I consider the technocrats as the "economic development" discourse coalition. Deacon and Stubbs (2013) define discourse coalition as the "embedded knowledge network that possesses authority because of their track record of problem-solving". While Deacon and Stubbs (2013) referred to international knowledge networks of policy actors, I used this term to describe the national state actors with the support of international actors who belong to the same epistemic community. These national state officials share the same educational qualifications as they graduated from universities in the US as economists or urban planners.

Economic development as a discipline shapes their ideologies, framing ideas and policy solutions, and networks of "knowledge-based" experts (Ho, 2022, p.619). The national bureaucratic actors from Bappenas and TNP2K received support from the World Bank, the

IMF and bilateral donors (Rosser & Murphy, 2023). They also received support from think tanks that belong to the same "epistemic community", including J-PAL and SMERU Research Institute, as discussed in Chapter Four (see also Olken, 2019; Datta et al., 2014). Their discipline shapes their ideologies, framing ideas and policy solutions, and networks of "knowledge-based" experts (Ho, 2022, p.610). They often focus on impact evaluations and quantitative analysis, providing evidence-based justification for the coalition's approach to social assistance.

The "economic development" discourse coalition shares a particular way of conceptualising poverty that underpins Indonesia's social assistance programs. As Leisering (2018) notes, "poverty is perceived, defined, measured, and discursively framed by social actors," reflected in social assistance programs. Similarly, Lister (2021) argues that "the policies developed to tackle poverty reflect dominant conceptualisation" (p.4). The conceptualisation of poverty is based on income, and econometric measurement underpins the design of national social assistance programs in Indonesia. This coalition shares a "politics of knowledge" based on the econometric method of measuring poverty and influencing the discourse and practices in poverty reduction initiatives, including how Indonesia adopted CCT as a policy model (McCarthy et al., 2023). This dominant conceptualisation of poverty underlies the Indonesian social protection system, defining who is deemed deserving or undeserving of assistance.

The dominant coalition of policy actors has ignored other ways of knowing, including how social assistance programs shifted local dynamics and created issues of exclusion. As John McCarthy et al. (2023, p.20) highlighted, "This politics of knowledge serves the ideological and material interests of specific actors and their projects and shapes specific field outcomes". Their work observed how the implementation of CCT in Indonesia was problematic. The national government adopted an international policy model without consideration of the local political dynamics that affect how CCT is implemented in Indonesia. Similarly, Mosse (2011) made a similar observation on how international development policy experts tend to see poverty issues as a "universal logic of new institutional economics and of law" (p.58), which tends to focus on seeing poverty as a "technical" issue rather than "political". As this thesis has illustrated, this "politics of knowledge" tends to overlook vulnerable population groups who do not fit with the econometric way of conceptualising poverty.

First, Indonesia's dominant poverty discourse, as reflected in the social assistance programs, continues to view poverty primarily as a lack of income and an "individual risk". In discussing discourse, I adopt Akhil Gupta's "discourse of global poverty", which employs a Foucauldian understanding of discourse. Here, the term "discourse" encompasses ideas circulating in

speeches and writings and extends to “institutions, policies and programs where they are materialised” (Gupta, 2011, p.416). The dominant discourse in Indonesia’s social assistance programs follows the World Bank’s Social Risk Management (SRM) model. This model frames social assistance as a “safety net” and views cash transfer as a means of “smoothing consumption”. It justifies cash transfer as the most cost-efficient method (Jawad, 2019).

As reflected in Chapter Four, the goal of smoothing consumption is manifested in the residual approach in Indonesia’s social assistance programs, which target only the poorest segments of society. Moreover, these programs have minimal benefit levels. Policy actors assume that if poor households receive various social assistance programs such as PKH, PIP, and Sembako, “the poor” will accumulate sufficient income to escape poverty.

The way these dominant policy actors conceptualise poverty and frame notions of deservingness in social assistance shows a lack of recognition of the structural causes of poverty. According to Lister (2021), the structural perspective of poverty looks at “how economic, social and political structures and processes – from the global to the local – create and perpetuate poverty” (p.43). The national policy actors working on social protection acknowledged that social assistance programs are insufficient to lift poor households out of poverty. As reflected in Chapter Five, policymakers highlighted the importance of women’s economic empowerment, livelihood programs that poor families should access, and social assistance programs.

Policy actors often overlook the structural drivers faced by recipients of social assistance programs that make them stuck in the cycle of poverty. The central government policymakers assume that through accessing livelihood programs such as micro-finance programs, “the poor” can alleviate poverty. However, many structural drivers of poverty, such as unequal access to land, have not been addressed. As I noted in Chapter Five, I illustrated how women living in poverty in Aceh Jaya, despite receiving the PKH program, have limited options to get themselves out of poverty. Due to not having access to land, their main livelihood was to collect clams from the river. These PKH recipients are stuck in what McCarthy (2020) called the “paradox of progressing sideways”, where the local conditions provide limited livelihood opportunities and the agrarian change is restricted, such as in the cases in Aceh. McCarthy and colleagues’ work across rural places in Indonesia also illustrated that despite Indonesia’s achievement in the reduction of statistical poverty, social assistance programs have yet to be able to improve the lives of the poor in different rural areas in Indonesia where there is increasing food insecurity, inequality and environmental decline (McCarthy et al., 2023, p.18)

Further, policymakers in social assistance programs that often frame poverty as a fault of the individuals have downplayed the government's institutional challenges when designing social assistance programs. As I discussed in Chapter Four, national policy actors designed PKH as a temporary measure where they expect the poor to "graduate" from the program after six years of receiving social assistance programs. However, a study found that PKH recipients are often not specifically targeted to receive other government economic empowerment programs, such as access to micro-finance or vocational training provided by the government (MAHKOTA & SMERU, 2020). As I have highlighted in Chapter Four, the institutional fragmentation among the different ministries has led to PKH recipients not being specifically targeted to receive livelihood programs from other ministries, such as access to micro-finance or vocational training, as it is outside the purview of the Ministry of Social Affairs.

Second, the hegemony of econometric measurement made the term "poor and vulnerable" or *"miskin dan rentan"* in Indonesian social policy increasingly focused on household-based poverty measurement and overlooked those categories that cannot be captured as "poor" according to official statistics. As alluded to in Chapter Four, the Indonesian government increasingly prioritised children to receive social assistance programs. The focus is only towards "children in poor households", using the government's definition of poverty and excluding other categories of vulnerable children who cannot be captured in the household survey. Similarly, the household-based poverty statistic cannot capture the vulnerabilities and experiences of women and elderly individuals.

Moreover, the household-based poverty measurement that makes the national government focus on household-based social assistance fails to account for the intra-household dynamics that can perpetuate the vulnerability of children, women or the elderly within the households. Household-based surveys that measure poverty are unlikely to capture the unequal distribution of resources or gender-based discrimination. As Chapter Five discussed, this underlying idea of providing social assistance at the household level assumes that resources are distributed equally within households without considering intra-household dynamics.

A feminist critique has shown how men and women experience poverty differently, and the household-based poverty measurement overlooks the gendered nature of the intra-household relationship, which often disadvantages women, especially in a patriarchal society (Bessell, 2020, p. 202; Kabeer, 2015). While women increasingly became the primary recipients of Indonesia's social assistance programs on behalf of their households, Indonesia's social assistance policy lacks gender awareness and analysis, which further perpetuates women's

vulnerability within Indonesia's social protection system and overlooks consideration of other household dynamics and tensions.

7.3.2 The limited influence of civil society organisations

Across the empirical chapters, I have demonstrated the limited influence of civil society actors (CSOs) in shaping Indonesia's social protection policies for vulnerable groups, including children, women living in poverty and the elderly. While CSOs, which Rosser and Murphy (2023) term the "progressive element" coalition, share a commitment to human rights and social justice, their impact on social assistance policy design has been constrained. This limited civil society engagement in welfare policy is a broader challenge in Southeast Asia, where "predatory elements" and entrenched bureaucratic interests often hold greater sway (Rosser & Murphy, 2023).

Despite past success in advocating universal health coverage (Sumarto, 2017), CSOs have struggled to push for a more inclusive social protection system beyond poor families with children. My findings align with Rosser and Van Diermen's (2016) observation that social programs for groups like the elderly, people with disabilities, and the unemployed lack support from powerful political elites due to their perceived lack of contribution to economic growth. Indonesia's commitment to "human rights" is limited towards a productivist social policy, such as universal access to health and education, but ignores access to broader social policy, including social protection (Rosser and Van Diemen, 2016).

This thesis's empirical chapter highlights several factors contributing to the limited influence of CSOs in Indonesia's social assistance landscape. There are competing priorities that the CSOs need to focus on. Different CSOs working on the issues related to children, women living in poverty and the elderly have broader agendas beyond social protection. For example, during the initial adoption of CCTs in Indonesia, international agencies and national NGOs focused on children's rights were working on the issue of deinstitutionalisation, where they were advocating for the government to shift its social welfare approach to children from an institutional care to a family-based approach, as discussed in Chapter Four.

Further, the Indonesian CSOs' work is also very fragmented. Fathimah Izzati (2024) observed that Indonesia's history of an authoritarian regime that depoliticised society fragmented Indonesian CSOs based on issues such as labour rights, education or environment, but did not tend to push collective action across issues. Further, a key agency that advocates for elderly issues, HelpAge International (Von Gliszczynski & Leisering, 2016), does not have a

strong presence in Indonesia. The women-focused CSOs that work with women living in poverty, such as PEKKA and Kapal Perempuan, started to engage on the issue of limited social protection for the elderly, which intersects with the issue of women living in poverty, as illustrated in Chapter Five.

Moreover, the dominance of the technocratic coalition at the national level, with the prevailing focus on economic growth, limits the space for alternative policy approaches advocated by CSOs. While their influence on national policy is limited, CSOs like PEKKA and Kapal Perempuan that work on the issue of women living in poverty have been more successful in advocating for social assistance access at the local level, particularly for women excluded from social assistance programs (Lockey et al., 2020). However, as reflected in Chapter Five, besides facing more powerful coalitions with different perspectives, women CSOs' efforts to influence national-level policy design have been less fruitful due to patriarchal norms and rising conservatism in Indonesia.

Using historical analysis, Indonesia's history of authoritarian regimes that constrained a progressive movement in the country may also contribute to the limitations of CSOs demanding more inclusive social protection. Rosser and Murphy (2023) argued that Southeast Asia's progressive elements, including NGOs and CSOs, are relatively weak. As Rosser and Murphy (2023) highlighted, although the democratisation and post-Suharto regime after the late 1990s has opened up space for civil society and NGOs in Indonesia, the "predatory oligarchic elites" still dominate Indonesia's politics and policy. Similarly, Izzati (2024) highlighted how the authoritarian regime left a legacy of depoliticisation in Indonesia's society that limits engagement to merely electoral politics and weakens constituency advocacy. In the next section, I will discuss how different socio-political dynamics at national and sub-national levels influence ideas of deservingness.

This historical legacy of depoliticisation and weak civil society advocacy creates a context where electoral politics and bureaucratic interests become the primary drivers shaping social assistance policy. Understanding these political and bureaucratic dynamics at both national and sub-national levels is crucial for explaining how notions of deservingness are constructed and institutionalised in Indonesia's social assistance programs. The following section examines these dynamics in detail, revealing how different institutional contexts at national and local levels create varying opportunities and constraints for policy actors.

7.4 Political dynamics, bureaucratic interests and deservingness

This section will address the research question: "What dynamics influence national and sub-national policy actors in framing notions of deservingness in social assistance programs?" In this section, I highlight how electoral politics, driven by the rise of populist politics, influence the notions of deservingness in social assistance both at the national and sub-national levels. However, I will also illustrate that high political interests are not sufficient to maintain the notion of deservingness. The role of state officials at both national and sub-national levels is highly influential in constructing notions of deservingness. At the national level, I focus on the competing interests of different institutions. Meanwhile, at the sub-national level, local policy entrepreneurs could navigate the different locally driven issues and align the political, institutional and practical interests.

7.4.1 National level: multi-party government and competing bureaucratic interests

As I illustrated in Chapter Four, populist politics have played a significant role in expanding social assistance programs at the national level. Populism, as a political style, emphasises performative gestures and symbolism over ideologies (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014). In Chapter Four, I illustrated how President Jokowi used social welfare cards to win presidential elections, cultivate an image of closeness to the people, and secure electoral support. This strategy mirrors the pattern in countries like India, where competitive populism drives welfare program expansion to appeal to voters (Gupta, 2012)

However, the empirical chapters reveal that while political elites like the president and parliament members utilise social assistance for electoral gain, their involvement in the detailed design of these programs is often limited. Political elites may prioritise launching or expanding programs that target significant and visible groups, such as poor families with children, to maximise political benefits. However, they often lack the technical expertise and in-depth understanding of the complexities of social assistance design (Datta et al., 2014; Ulriksen, 2019)

Further, as Indonesia's voters are mostly under 35 years old, political elites such as the president are more inclined to provide social assistance for the younger population (Fionna & Hutchinson, 2019). As discussed in Chapter Six, Indonesian politicians do not pay specific attention to population groups like the elderly because the percentage of Indonesia's elderly is small, comprising only 10.82% of the total population. As van Diermen (2018) has also argued in her analysis of Indonesia's social protection reform, the extension of social assistance programs in Indonesia targets only those groups that can generate economic or

political benefits for the political elites. Chapter Six also illustrated the slow progress of the Elderly Law revision.

Moreover, Indonesia's multi-party system, comprising the cabinet of different party leaders with competing interests, created fragmentation in social assistance programs. This fragmentation creates difficulties in coordination as different ministries may have conflicting priorities and approaches to social assistance. The initial design of the PKH program, which was intended to involve multiple ministries but ultimately became solely managed by the Ministry of Social Affairs, exemplifies these challenges (Widianto, 2013). In the original design of PKH, as the objectives of PKH link to health and education outcomes, the involvement of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education as the service providers in the two sectors is key. However, this coordination between ministries for a particular program has proven challenging. The PKH program is fully under the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs. However, as pointed out in an existing study, Indonesian politicians from political parties support the poverty reduction agenda but have limited technical knowledge about the issue: "Most politicians show little understanding of the causes and various forms of poverty or the kinds of strategies that might lead to improvement" (Datta et al., 2014, p.20).

This limited involvement of political elites created a space for technocrats within the bureaucracy to play a more dominant role in shaping the details of social assistance policy. As illustrated in Chapter Four, the dominant "liberal economic" technocrats (Rosser & Murphy, 2023; van Diermen, 2018), mainly in Bappenas and TNP2K, play an influential role in formulating Indonesia's social protection reform, including in designing social assistance programs (Datta, et al., 2014; Kwon & Kim, 2015). The coalition of liberal economic technocrats in Indonesia's social protection reform has reached a consensus, for example, in Indonesia's approach to poverty-targeting programs like CCT promoted by the World Bank. However, as Chapter Six illustrates, the coalition may have diverse views due to conflicting interests. Bappenas is reluctant to expand new social assistance programs for the elderly and expand social assistance through the existing program, PKH. TNP2K, which sees itself as the government's think tank, proposed that the Indonesian government introduce new social assistance for the elderly as reflected in their social protection report (2018).

7.4.2 Sub-national level: Navigating local political dynamics and various institutional interests

Building on the analysis of how the national policy actors' coalition influenced Indonesia's idea of deserving social assistance through a dominant poverty discourse, this section shifts the focus to the sub-national level, examining how local policy actors navigate political and

bureaucratic interests, formulating social assistance programs. I argue that local socio-political context leads to complex and fluid notions of deservingness, often distinct from national-level priorities. Local policy entrepreneurs play a crucial role in aligning political objectives with institutional constraints, adapting and reframing ideas of deservingness to fit local needs and priorities.

Local policy entrepreneurs: bridging politics and bureaucracy

Unlike national-level actors, local officials often play dual roles as policy advocates and implementers. While Devereux's (2023) "policy entrepreneurs" concept distinguishes between those who frame social problems and those who implement programs, this study finds that local state actors often perform both functions. This dual role allows them to directly shape program design and implementation, responding to local political dynamics and bureaucratic interests. At the sub-national level, policy entrepreneurs must navigate between competing interests and balance local political priorities with institutional constraints and national policy agendas.

Like the national-level social assistance programs, populist politics mainly drives the social assistance programs at the local level. Local political elites introduce social assistance programs for their political electoral advantage; local political leaders also use social assistance programs to boost their popularity. As the empirical chapters have discussed, especially in Chapters Four and Six, local political candidates use social assistance programs, especially those targeted at children and the elderly, to win the local elections. While giving social assistance programs for short-term gains, such as winning the election, the local state bureaucracy is instrumental in ensuring the program can be institutionalised, not just used for election promotion.

For instance, in Chapter Four's case of the child grant, local actors in Papua and Sabang adapted the concept to fit their specific contexts. By leveraging their Special Autonomy status and funds, Papua officials framed the grant as supporting "Indigenous Papuan Children". They positioned it as an alternative to the national CCT model of PKH. Similarly, the Sabang City government strategically linked the child grant Geunaseh to the national government's priority of "stunting reduction", placing the program under the purview of the local health office rather than the social affairs department. This demonstrates the strategic decisions of local policy actors to adapt international policy models to local needs and priorities and the strategic use of framing to garner support and resources. Devereux (2023) called this strategy a "Trojan horse" tactic where a social assistance program is disguised under other policy agendas to

gain political support. Similar to examples from Zambia and African countries, where the government introduced social assistance as a response to HIV/AIDS. These examples highlight the need to adapt international policy models to meet local institutional interests and political realities.

As the empirical chapters have highlighted, local policy entrepreneurs face three typical institutional constraints or challenges: changes in local political leadership, limited fiscal capacity, and audit recommendations from state audit offices (BPK or BPKP). However, the sub-national case studies illustrate that local policy entrepreneurs can use their agency and respond differently to these challenges, leading to different policy outcomes towards population groups.

Changes in political leadership

Changes in local political leadership can significantly influence the trajectory of social assistance programs. In Bintan, a new district head's priorities led to expanding elderly assistance to include low-income state pensioners, which was not the original target of the elderly grant. Bintan Dinsos officials then have to find the justification for these political decisions from a technocratic perspective to ensure that the political interests align with the agency's bureaucratic interests. In contrast, in Aceh Jaya, the elderly grant program remained stable despite leadership changes.

As discussed in Chapter Six, the state officials in Aceh Jaya, both in Bappeda and Social Affairs, play an instrumental role in ensuring the sustainability of the program, while Dinsos officials were in charge of formulating the elderly social assistance by adopting a national-level initiative, but adapted based on the local context. Meanwhile, Bappeda ensures that there is a local regulation that can ensure the continuity of the program.

Limited fiscal capacity

Limited fiscal capacity is a significant constraint for local governments in implementing social assistance programs. Similar to the national government's narrative on the budget limitation for social protection, as highlighted by existing studies on Indonesia's social protection reform, the issue of limited fiscal capacity at the sub-national level is also a common barrier. However, from Chapter Six, we see how various districts responded differently to the constraint of limited fiscal capacity. As discussed in Chapter Six, in Badung, for example, the initial universal elderly grant was scaled back due to budget constraints exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Badung District changed eligibility criteria to include only the elderly in the poverty

database (DTKS) – that is, the construction of deservingness was narrowed as a fiscal strategy.

Meanwhile, the fiscal constraints in Bintan also led to only one elderly person per household receiving the elderly grant. The Bintan government wants to ensure that each household with an elderly member receives social assistance programs. The local officials also want to ensure there is no jealousy in the community when one household receives assistance but others do not. Aceh Jaya used a different approach in strategising limited capacity. They focus on targeting the “most vulnerable” elderly by using age criteria. State officials maintained their universal elderly grant by framing it as essential for upholding cultural traditions and supporting family sharing.

Audit Recommendations

As I also discussed in Chapter Six, audit office recommendations can be considered as a constraint and can influence different outcomes in elderly social assistance. State audit recommendations also pose challenges for local policy entrepreneurs. In Badung, the BPK audit significantly reduced elderly beneficiaries by recommending a program targeting based on the DTKS. However, in Bintan, officials successfully resisted BPKP recommendations to reclaim funds from beneficiaries who received national and local assistance, demonstrating the agency of local actors in negotiating and justifying their program design choices.

In summary, the sub-national level reveals a dynamic interplay of political interests, bureaucratic constraints, and local values that shape social assistance programs. Local policy entrepreneurs are crucial in shaping social assistance programs at Indonesia’s sub-national level. Their agency is evident in their responses to fiscal constraints, audit recommendations and changes in political leadership.

These findings underscore the importance of understanding local dynamics in designing and implementing effective social assistance policies. Local policy entrepreneurs navigate complexities, adapting and reframing ideas of deservingness to fit the local context. While local politicians often introduce programs to garner political support, state officials within agencies like Bappeda and Dinsos must strategically align these populist agendas with critical local issues and institutional objectives and constraints, including limited fiscal capacity, audit recommendations and changes in political leadership.

The varying dynamics at national and sub-national levels have created distinct patterns in how deservingness is constructed for different target groups. By examining how these patterns manifest across our three case studies – children, women, and the elderly – we can better understand how the interplay of socio-cultural values, policy paradigms, and institutional interests shapes social assistance outcomes. The following cross-case analysis reveals commonalities and differences in how deservingness is constructed for each group, highlighting the complex ways national policy frameworks interact with local implementation contexts.

7.5. Cross-case analysis on ideas of deservingness in social assistance

Reflecting on the three case studies, cross-cutting patterns emerge when examining how deservingness is constructed for children, women, and the elderly in Indonesia's social assistance programs. The analysis reveals two distinct but interrelated dimensions that shape how deservingness is constructed: ideational patterns and policy discourse (Table 7.1) and the role of policy actors, interests and political dynamics (Table 7.2). These dimensions help explain varying levels of inclusion and exclusion in social assistance across the three groups.

7.5.1 Ideational pattern and policy discourse

Table 7.1: The ideational patterns and policy discourse

Factor	Children	Women	Elderly
Socio-cultural Values	Islamic values (*fakir miskin*, orphans), emphasis on child well-being	Religious and cultural gender norms (State *Ibuism),* emphasis on motherhood	Religious values (respect for elders), family norms (filial piety), local cultural traditions (*Meugang*)
Policy Discourse	The social investment paradigm dominates, emphasising CCTs and the limited influence of child rights advocates.	The social investment paradigm reinforces traditional gender roles and has a limited influence on women's rights advocates.	Tension between social investment (productivity) and local values (respect, care); Limited national focus
Dominant Narrative	Children as human capital investments	Women's empowerment (but limited social protection)	Fiscal constraint in providing for the elderly
Policy Outcome	Prioritisation of children in poor households (PKH), a limited rights-based approach for vulnerable children	Limited social protection for women in the informal sector, microfinance reinforces traditional roles without supporting unpaid care work.	Fragmented elderly policy, limited national programs, reliance on local initiatives

The influence of religious values varies significantly across the three groups. For children, Islamic values provide strong justification for social assistance through two key Islamic

concepts: *fakir miskin* (the destitute) and *anak yatim* (orphan children). These religious principles actively support the inclusion of children, particularly those from poor families, in social assistance programs. Religious values also align with the social investment paradigm that prioritises children, viewing them as human capital investments. This combination led the national government to target its main social assistance programs at children of poor families.

For women, religious values combined with the dominant gender ideology of *State Ibuism* (discussed in Chapter Five) reinforce women's identity primarily as mothers. Further, the social investment paradigm also acknowledges women's role in human capital development, primarily through their reproductive function as mothers. This combination reinforced rather than transformed women's traditional gender roles, leading to limited recognition of women's needs as independent economic actors, particularly in the informal sector.

The elderly present an interesting paradox. While religious and cultural values emphasise respect for the elderly, these values have not translated effectively into social assistance entitlements nationally. The social investment paradigm is more dominant at the national level, emphasising future productivity and economic growth and creating tension with cultural values. This tension helps explain why national-level support for elderly social assistance remains limited. However, as seen in cases like Aceh Jaya, the Islamic tradition of Meugang can justify local social assistance initiatives.

7.5.2 Policy actors and political dynamics

Table 7.2: Actors, interests and political dynamics

Factor	Children	Women	Elderly
Actors and Networks	*National:* Liberal economy technocrats (supported by the World Bank) promoting CCT based on a residual approach *Sub-national:* International agencies with local policy entrepreneurs	National technocrats with some influence from women CSOs	*National:* Women CSO, academics/research think tanks, individuals in national agencies *Sub-national:* local political leaders and local policy entrepreneurs
Interests	*National:* High political interests for electoral purposes (mostly at the national level) *Sub-national:* political interests and bureaucratic interests (Nutrition agenda)	Low interest politically, women CSOs have limited political influence	*National*: Low political interest; *Sub-national:* high political interest at the local level

Political Dynamics	*National:* Populist politics – pro-poor policy specifically targeting children *Sub-National:* Local innovation compensating for inadequate national targeting	*State Ibuism* (Gender Order) – slow progress in reforming the agenda	*National:* Limited political interests, low priority *Sub-National*: Local populist strategies addressing national policy neglect

Key actors, their interests and political dynamics influence how deservingness is translated into policy outcomes. Table 7.2 demonstrates how different configurations of policy actors and political interests lead to varying levels of support and program institutionalisation across three groups. National technocrats lead programs targeting children of poor families. Strong electoral political interests and the World Bank's influential role support the dominant "liberal economic technocrats" as part of the broader policy coalition. This combination of technical expertise and political backing has helped institutionalise major national programs like PKH and PIP.

Women's issues in social assistance have received less focused attention from technocrats and political actors. As Chapter Five illustrated, political actors such as the president often target women for populist reasons, acknowledging women as mothers or in their role as small business owners (UMKM). However, dominant policy actors in social assistance have not made the gender equality agenda a priority in poverty reduction. The national policy actors do not emphasise the gendered nature of poverty or use a gender lens in designing social assistance programs targeting the family. CSOs, whose perspectives fall outside the dominant "epistemic community" of economists, have less influence on how policy is designed.

The elderly present a different pattern of actor engagement. There is limited political interest and divided technocratic support at the national level. Meanwhile, populist politics at the district level have made the elderly a local priority in receiving social assistance. However, we see more varied engagement at the local level, with local policy entrepreneurs' ability to align competing interests that can lead to different outcomes. This variation in actor engagement helps explain the fragmented nature of elderly social assistance in Indonesia.

In summary, these patterns across ideas, actors, and institutions help explain why some groups have gained more comprehensive coverage than others. Children's programs have benefited from a strong alignment between religious values, the social investment paradigm, and political interests. Women's inclusion remains partial, constrained by gender norms and

limited political advocacy. The elderly face the most fragmented support, with local initiatives often filling gaps left by limited national commitment.

7.6 Chapter conclusion

This thesis and chapter demonstrate that the construct of deservingness in social assistance programs is not static. The complex interplay of socio-cultural values, the dominant social investment paradigm, and the strategic actions of policy entrepreneurs at both national and local levels co-produce the dynamic and contested construct of deservingness. It works out differently in each case study, which can lead to exclusion and inclusion in social assistance. The analysis supports the following argument:

First, the construct of “deserving poor” is a dynamic product of the interplay between ideas influenced by socio-cultural values and the hegemony of the social investment paradigm. This convergence reinforces a productivist framing of social assistance and actively limits the development of rights-based approaches to social protection. Religious values, gender norms and family expectations intersect with externally driven social investment paradigms to shape how social assistance programs construct different groups as deserving.

Second, state officials acting as policy entrepreneurs are crucial in shaping poverty discourse and mobilising different ideas of deservingness to align with political and bureaucratic interests. At the national level, a powerful network of “liberal economic ethnocrats” dominates through their shared “politics of knowledge” (McCarthy et al., 2023) centred on econometric approaches to poverty measurement. While politically powerful, this technical framing often overlooks structural determinants of poverty and diverse experiences of vulnerability among different population groups.

Third, local-level socio-political dynamics create a more fluid concept of deservingness that often differs from national priorities. Regional policy actors navigate various challenges by balancing competing populist politics, bureaucratic interests and locally driven issues, leading to a distinct pattern of inclusion and exclusion across jurisdictions.

This analysis reveals that formulating Indonesia’s notion of deservingness in social assistance is not merely a technical exercise, but a profoundly political process shaped by the convergence of socio-cultural values, dominant poverty discourse and the social investment paradigm. Domestic state officials play a pivotal role in shaping the discourse around poverty and strategically aligning notions of deservingness with political and bureaucratic interests within this framework. By understanding the nuances of these interactions, advocates for more

inclusive social assistance can get valuable insights into the patterns of inclusion and exclusion that characterise social assistance programs and their broader implications for social welfare in Indonesia.

Chapter Eight: Between Global Paradigms and Local Values: Rethinking Deservingness in Indonesia's Social Protection

This thesis explored the complex dynamics shaping the ideas of deservingness in social assistance programs, revealing how these constructs influence the pattern of inclusion and exclusion for different population groups. Using an interpretive anthropology of policy approach, this research examined why issues of exclusion persist despite the expansion of social assistance programs in the Global South. Using Indonesia as a case, this study focused on the factors behind the policymaking process that create exclusion, complementing existing research on exclusion and policy implementation issues. This thesis also investigated how a decentralised polity can provide social assistance programs for vulnerable target groups. The overall research question was: "How do notions of deservingness influence the inclusion and exclusion of different target groups in social assistance?"

8.1 Empirical findings and key arguments

This thesis investigates the underlying ideas in Indonesia's social assistance programs and considers how they reflect notions of deservingness among different target groups. This study emphasises the importance of unpacking socio-cultural values and how they influence the ideas underpinning social assistance programs. As discussed in the empirical chapters, the socio-cultural values that influence the construct of deservingness are religious, gender and family norms. These ideas influence how the State prioritises or deprioritises target population groups receiving social assistance programs at different jurisdiction levels.

This analysis reveals various policy actors influencing the construction of target groups in social assistance programs. This thesis complements existing research that heavily focuses on the role of international development actors such as the World Bank (Peck & Theodore, 2015c). Instead, this thesis explores the role of domestic policy actors, especially examining state officials, and provides insights into the role of policy coalitions and different "policy entrepreneur" types in social protection reform. ‘

Further, there are contrasting notions of deservingness in social assistance programs at the national and sub-national levels. As illustrated in Chapter Four, the dominant policy coalitions and national electoral politics shape national-level decisions on targeting children of poor families in social assistance programs. In comparison, local values and knowledge interacting with populist politics can create different results at the sub-national level for the elderly in social assistance programs, as illustrated in Chapter Six. Ideas of deservingness for the elderly are

co-produced by locally driven issues and political, bureaucratic and practical interests, which can lead to distinct outcomes in social assistance.

The construct of deservingness, which critically influences the pattern of inclusion and exclusion in social assistance, is dynamic and contested, shaped by the complex interplay between socio-cultural values, externally driven policy paradigms, and state officials' bureaucratic, political and practical interests at both national and sub-national levels.

Indonesia's social assistance programs construct and target children by adopting the two global policy models in social assistance: Conditional Cash Transfer (CCTs) and Child Grant. Each policy model reflects different notions of deserving children. As we saw in Chapter Four, the national-level technocrats in Bappenas and TNP2K largely influence a particular construct of deservingness that entitles children from poor families to social assistance. Rosser and Murphy (2023) referred to this group as the "liberal economic technocrats" who promote the idea of residual social assistance and adhere to the social investment paradigm, prioritising children within poor households as "human capital". The adoption and institutionalisation of CCT is under the strong influence and support of the World Bank. Further, the preferred CCT model is also more aligned with existing socio-cultural values, such as the Islamic concepts of *fakir miskin* and *anak yatim (*orphans).

The alternative child grant policy model, where children are deserving based on human rights principles and aligned with the UNCRC, gains less traction at the national level. The child grant model uses the underpinning idea that children are deserving based on their vulnerability and entitlement; hence, the poverty approach is not used for targeting. On the contrary, the child grant model has gained traction in sub-national jurisdictions such as Papua Province and Sabang City. Local state officials promoted the idea of a child grant as a policy alternative that fits in their context more than the national government's approach to CCT. The local policy actors considered the CCT approach using a poverty-targeted mechanism and created tensions in the community, such as in the case of Sabang City. In contrast, state officials in Papua Province considered that the CCT program, which requires program facilitators, does not fit the Papuan context because of the province's limited human resources capacity and the remoteness of the region.

As illustrated in Chapter Four, the construction of children of poor families as deserving of social assistance has unintentionally made children outside the family less deserving. The narrow conceptualisation and measurement of poverty based on money metric value overlooks the vulnerable children categories outside poor households, such as those in

institutional care or those facing social risks not captured by income metrics. This exclusion highlights the limitations of this approach in addressing the diverse needs of all children.

Indonesia's social assistance and broader poverty reduction programs construct women as deserving. Indonesia's social assistance programs, such as PKH, primarily target women living in poverty in their reproductive role as mothers, as discussed in Chapter Five. However, the State overlooks women's productive role, mostly working in the informal sector, which is reflected in the limited social protection for women.

The Indonesian government's focus on micro-finance programs constructs women's deservingness narrowly as "small business owners", inadvertently reinforcing traditional gender norms rather than challenging them. While these programs appear to support women's economic empowerment, research on women's MSMEs in Indonesia reveals that women often choose micro-enterprises not as a path to entrepreneurship but as their only option to earn an income while managing household responsibilities (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2023). Although the government has begun acknowledging women's economic roles through micro-finance support, this approach fails to address women's fundamental vulnerabilities in the informal sector.

Without comprehensive social protection, women running micro-enterprises remain vulnerable because their livelihood is inherently unstable and unpredictable. Despite having access to capital through micro-finance programs, women's economic vulnerability persists because Indonesia's social protection system remains biased toward formal sector workers. Women working in the informal sector typically lack access to workers' insurance or BPJS Ketenagakerjaan, which would provide essential protections such as work injury coverage, old-age benefits, and pension security. Further, as Chapter Five illustrated, crises like COVID-19 can severely impact these women's income and livelihood, yet the Indonesian government tends to focus on supporting the formal sector workers.

As Chapter Five illustrates, women's deservingness in social assistance reflects the existing gender norms. Indonesia's predominant gender norms are based on a gender ideology called *"State Ibuism",* produced during the New Order Era from the 1960s up to 1998. Further, after Indonesia democratised, the existing gender norms continued with the rise of Islamic conservatism, especially among Indonesia's middle class, where the identity of women is based on being pious wives and mothers of their children. This construct does not fit with the reality of women with lower socio-economic income who have to juggle between their productive and reproductive roles. Further, a conceptualisation of poverty based on household

income in Indonesia ignored gender relations within the household. As discussed in Chapters Five and Seven, women's entitlement to social assistance is linked to their role within their households, ignoring their rights as individuals. This suggests a particular notion of women's deservingness only in their role as mothers and wives.

Social assistance programs for the elderly reflect different ideas of deserving elderly in different jurisdictions. As we consider in Chapter Six, the construction of deservingness for the elderly occurs in a contested terrain, with a tension between the social investment paradigm dominating at the national level and local values that are more prominent at the sub-national level. This tension results in a fragmented policy landscape, with limited elderly social assistance at the national level and a reliance on local initiatives often driven by local policy entrepreneurs.

At the national level, the social investment hegemony led to two outcomes for the elderly: the elderly being less of a priority as the State focused on the "productive" population groups like children; and second, the idea that the elderly need to continue to be productive in order not to become a burden for the State. Meanwhile, the sub-national government introduced social assistance for the elderly, which was driven by local political leaders' electoral interest and the use of religious values of respecting the elderly as a justification.

As illustrated in Chapter Six, local policy entrepreneurs play an instrumental role in shaping social assistance policy outcomes for the elderly. They use their knowledge and experience to align different interests, such as bureaucratic interests and the political interests of the local leaders. Unlike national policy entrepreneurs, local policy entrepreneurs are usually not part of a particular epistemic community. Their perspectives on the problem of the elderly affect the way they make policy decisions. For example, in the case of the Badung district, limited fiscal capacity and concern over audit findings led to an elderly grant that is less inclusive and only for those in the government's poverty database, which is known to have many errors. While in Aceh Jaya, despite the weak capacity of the local government, the pressing issue of poverty and the cultural traditions, such as Meugang (celebration before the Eid holiday), have led the local state officials to ensure the continuity of the elderly grant despite changes in the district head position.

This thesis advances three key arguments: First, the dominant ideas of deservingness in social assistance emerge from the convergence of religious, gender and family norms with the hegemonic influence of the social investment paradigm. Taken together, this convergence reinforces a productivist framing of social assistance and forestalls a rights-based approach

to social protection. Second, a dominant coalition of "liberal economic technocrats" within the national government bureaucracy shapes Indonesia's poverty discourse based on applying a money-metrics measurement. It promotes a residual approach to social assistance that excludes vulnerable groups who do not fit their narrow definition of poverty. Last, local-level socio-political dynamics provide a space for a more fluid concept of deservingness, often differing from national-level priorities, with local policy entrepreneurs playing a crucial role in aligning political goals with bureaucratic and practical interests.

In sum, this analysis reveals how the concept of deservingness in Indonesian social assistance is not monolithic but varies across different jurisdictions, shaped by a complex interplay of factors. The dominant role of national-level technocrats in shaping policy for children, the influence of gender norms on programs targeting women, and the reliance on local policy entrepreneurs for elderly assistance all contribute to this diversity.

8.2 Theoretical contributions and way forward

This thesis contributes to understanding social assistance policy in the Global South, particularly through its analysis of deservingness as a crucial lens for examining patterns of inclusion and exclusion. The research advances theoretical understanding in three key areas: Deservingness, the role of policy actors and poverty discourse, and the importance of multi-level governance dynamics in social protection reform.

8.2.1 Deservingness

This study uses "deservingness" to examine a country's political commitment towards different population groups by illustrating the different dynamics influencing changing notions of deservingness across time and levels of government. Following Leisering's (2018) argument on how ideas of deservingness can be contested and shaped by societal actors, this thesis shows different contestations and factors influenced by dominant networks of policy actors, with particular politics of knowledge, are reflected in Indonesia's national-level social protection policy.

First, the analysis reveals how ideas of deservingness are constructed through the complex interaction between domestic socio-cultural values and the international development paradigm. This thesis builds on Pruce's work on the Zambia cash transfer program, highlighting the importance of local ideas of deservingness and "social acceptability" in shaping social protection outcomes as discussed in Chapter Three. Pruce's (2019) study found that Zambian local perceptions of deservingness largely aligned with the Western welfare state criteria: those who lack control over their circumstances, like the elderly and

people with disability, are most deserving. Pruce's approach adopted van Oorschot's (2000) criteria of deservingness, emphasising factors like control, need and reciprocity. However, deservingness advances Leisering's (2018) suggestions in this thesis, seeing it as a social construct that societal actors can contest and change. Here, the construct of deservingness is not static but dynamic.

Further, this study advances the understanding that deservingness is deeply embedded in socio-cultural values such as religious values, gender norms and family expectations. On the one hand, the discussion of Indonesia's notions of deservingness in this study resonates with Naomi Hossain's (2005) analysis of the "deserving poor" in Bangladesh, where she found that economic contribution significantly shaped elite perceptions of deservingness. In the case of Bangladesh, this led to the "working poor" being seen as most deserving of assistance. This thesis extends Hossain's insights by showing how Indonesia has similar productivist values embedded in Indonesia's social assistance, with a focus on "poor families with children". However, moving beyond Hossain's work, this research illustrates how the religious values of *"fakir miskin"* converge with an externally driven paradigm, social investment. The social investment paradigm reinforces the productivist approach to social protection, focusing more on children as "future investment" or engaging for growth, as discussed in Chapters Seven and Four.

8.2.2 Poverty discourse and dominant policy actors

The second theoretical contribution advances our understanding of how poverty discourse shapes social assistance policy through technocratic practices. Previous studies highlighted how the politics of knowledge based on the econometrics approach to poverty has created unintended consequences of "disempowering local people" (McCarthy et al., 2023, p.20). While McCarthy and colleagues' work focuses on how this affects poverty programs in rural Indonesia, this thesis extends their insights to show how this technocratic dominance shapes deservingness ideas across different target population groups in social assistance. This thesis also took this argument further by illustrating how this dominant poverty discourse reflects socio-cultural values, including religious and gender norms.

This thesis reveals how Indonesia's liberal economic technocrats use money-metric poverty measurements to create and sustain a particular notion of social assistance that reinforces a narrow understanding of need and deservingness. The empirical chapters demonstrate how the dominance of econometric poverty measurement in Indonesia's bureaucracy creates what Ferguson (1994) termed an "anti-politics machine", where political choices about who deserves assistance are transformed into seemingly neutral technical decisions about poverty

lines and targeting mechanisms. This thesis builds on this by showing how these shared assumptions create specific patterns of exclusion, particularly for vulnerable groups whose conditions cannot be captured through household income measures alone. For instance, while children in poor families receive assistance through PKH, vulnerable children outside traditional family structures often remain excluded because they do not fit within conventional household poverty metrics. Similarly, women's vulnerabilities in the informal sector and elderly care needs are overlooked when poverty is reduced to household expenditure measures. As Ruth Lister's (2021) work highlights, how poverty is measured using technocratic approaches can overlook how it is experienced and understood.

This study also extends the work of Rosser and Murphy (2023), who coined the term "liberal economic technocrats", which I used to describe the dominant policy actors in Indonesia's social protection policy. Rosser and Murphy's work has identified the "government technocrats" as one of the coalition groups influencing Southeast Asia policy reform. This thesis advances the understanding that this group of coalitions is not monolithic but that there are dynamics within the coalition. Competing institutional interests can lead to different preferences in extending social protection coverage to different population groups, even within the policy coalition. This led to different notions of deservingness, such as in the case of the elderly and social assistance in Indonesia: Bappenas focuses on extending social assistance within the existing PKH program, while TNP2K advocates for a specific social pension program outside of PKH.

8.2.3 On a multi-level approach and the role of sub-national government in social protection policy

The third theoretical contribution concerns multi-level governance in social protection policy, regarding how local dynamics create distinct patterns of policy development. While scholars like Fenwick (2017) and Lavers (2022) have examined how local governments implement national social assistance programs, the case studies demonstrate that local governments can be important sites of policy innovation, developing programs that respond to locally understood needs and vulnerabilities.

This research complements existing studies focusing on pro-poor policies and local political leaders (Rosser & Murphy, 2023; Rosser & Wilson, 2012). This analysis aligns with Rosser and Murphy's (2023) analysis of local political leaders, such as *Bupati*, as "political entrepreneurs" who use redistributive policies, including social assistance, for electoral gain. This is part of the local political elites' populist strategy, as Chapter Six demonstrates. However, this thesis advances our understanding of sub-national policy dynamics by

highlighting the role and influence of “local policy entrepreneurs” who are state officials or civil servants. These state officials ensured that the political elite's populist strategies of extending social assistance were effectively balanced with bureaucratic requirements and practical implementation challenges.

Identifying local state actors as “policy entrepreneurs” enriches existing literature on policy entrepreneurship in social protection reform in the Global South. While Ulriksen's (2019) and Devereux’s work (2023) in Sub-Saharan Africa focus on policy entrepreneurs from international agencies or domestic policy actors at the national level, sub-national state officials can also act as policy entrepreneurs even without direct involvement from national policy actors or international policy actors. Local policy entrepreneurs also tend not to be affiliated with a particular epistemic community like the national policy actors. These local state officials tweaked national government frameworks while providing context-specific rationales based on their understanding of local political dynamics.

Furthermore, unlike the national level, where institutional fragmentation exists between policy formulators (such as Bappenas and TNP2K) and implementers (such as the Ministry of Social Affairs), policy development at the sub-national level can be more dynamic and innovative due to streamlined governance structures. At the district level, agencies like Bappeda and Dinsos can formulate and implement policy, creating opportunities for more responsive and inclusive social assistance programs.

8.2.4 Future research direction

These theoretical contributions suggest several promising directions for future research. Comparative studies across Southeast Asian countries could examine how different configurations of technocratic influence, cultural values, and local political dynamics produce varying approaches to social assistance. Further, the research could investigate how rights-based approaches to social protection might be effectively combined with existing social investment and poverty reduction frameworks, particularly at the local government level, where policy innovation may be more flexible.

This thesis also illustrates the importance of looking at specific target population groups to analyse exclusion in social assistance programs, especially vulnerable ones. Existing studies on the politics of social protection often focus on a particular program or a policy model, such as Conditional Cash Transfer. The deservingness framework employed in this research can be further expanded to analyse social assistance programs targeted towards other vulnerable groups in Indonesia and beyond. This includes social assistance for people with disabilities,

who existing studies have highlighted as lagging in access to social protection. Furthermore, given that religious values heavily influence the deservingness framework in Indonesia, future research could examine how marginalised groups facing negative stigma, such as LGBTQ communities, are affected. These communities often face discrimination based on particular conservative religious beliefs, which may significantly impact their access to and eligibility for social assistance programs. In other countries with less religious influence, what other dominant factors would contribute to the notions of deservingness and to what extent can it lead to more inclusive outcomes towards vulnerable groups?

This research also suggests important methodological implications for studying social protection reform. The multi-sited and multi-level analysis employed here reveals how deservingness is constructed differently across governance levels, suggesting the value of similar approaches in other contexts. Future studies could utilise this approach to examine how local political windows create opportunities for expanding social assistance to vulnerable groups and how these local innovations might influence national policy development.

8.3 Research limitations

This section discusses the limitations of this research. This study primarily focused on sociocultural values, externally driven development ideas, and poverty discourse regarding the social realities of the policy actors who formulate or influence social assistance programs. The research design was pragmatically adapted to COVID-19, which created uncertainties about conducting in-person fieldwork. Consequently, this study focused mostly on the policy actors' perspectives, especially state actors at the national and sub-national levels responsible for formulating Indonesia's social assistance policy. This perspective can be both a weakness and a strength when looking at the issue of exclusion. While I eventually did conduct in-person fieldwork, including interviews and focus-group discussions with policy implementers or the "street-level bureaucrats" such as PKH program facilitators and a few recipients of social assistance programs, this study has not comprehensively captured deservingness from the perspective of these street-level bureaucrats or the community in general. Future studies can research deservingness from the program implementers and recipients' perspectives, and to what extent program implementation influences exclusion in receiving social assistance.

8.4 Policy implications

My analysis of deservingness in Indonesia's social assistance suggests several key policy recommendations for creating more inclusive social protection. These recommendations address gaps at both national and local levels while emphasising more gender-responsive social protection. First, the national government could consider extending social assistance

programs to groups currently left behind due to the notions of deservingness identified in this study. This includes developing specific programs for children living outside traditional family structures and women working in the informal sector and adopting a more comprehensive approach to elderly social assistance. Rather than relying solely on household-based poverty targeting, policy design should recognise individual vulnerabilities within these groups.

Second, the research demonstrates how local governments can potentially fill gaps in national social protection coverage, particularly when they have adequate fiscal capacity. While this approach may create regional disparities, it also presents opportunities for policy innovation. The national government could systematically support and incentivise local government initiatives by expanding the recognition system for innovative local social assistance programs, building on examples like the ASLURETI program in Aceh Jaya and Bintan's elderly scheme. The recognition from the central government would provide political and institutional incentives for local policy actors to ensure the sustainability of social assistance programs for vulnerable groups.

Third, the government could make the current social protection system more gender-responsive, specifically addressing women's vulnerabilities. This involves recognising and mitigating the additional burdens placed on women by existing gender norms and social assistance programs. The government could reassess conditionalities in programs like CCT to ensure they do not disproportionately burden women. Furthermore, expanding social protection coverage (both assistance and insurance) for women in the informal sector is crucial. Incorporating perspectives from women's CSOs and rights advocates in social protection policy discussions is essential to achieve this.

While addressing deep-rooted gender norms may be beyond the scope of social assistance programs, steps can be taken towards more gender-transformative approaches. This could include redesigning conditionalities to encourage shared responsibilities, such as incentivising fathers' participation in children's health check-ups. Programs could also promote equal distribution of care work within families through their design and messaging. Further, in light of Indonesia's recent "Road Map on Care Economy" (ILO, 2024), social assistance programs may be aligned with broader care work and care economy objectives. This involves ensuring that social assistance programs complement and support care economy initiatives. Programs can be designed to recognise and value unpaid care work, mainly done by women. The government needs to explore how social protection can contribute to a more equitable distribution of care responsibilities in society.

Lastly, an intersectionality lens can be employed in formulating social assistance policies, recognising that the vulnerabilities of children, women, and the elderly are often interlinked. This approach involves moving beyond household-based targeting to consider individual entitlements within vulnerable groups. Prioritising assistance for particularly vulnerable subgroups, such as older women living alone, is crucial. Programs can be designed to address multiple intersecting vulnerabilities simultaneously.

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