

RECALIBRATING SOCIAL PROTECTION: INSIGHTS FROM IMPLEMENTATION OF INDONESIA'S FAMILY HOPE PROGRAM (PKH)

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Abstrak

Poverty remains a significant impediment to inclusive development in Indonesia, particularly in limiting access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities for low-income families. In response, the Indonesian government launched the Family Hope Program (Program Keluarga Harapan/PKH), a conditional cash transfer initiative designed to reduce poverty by encouraging school attendance and health service utilization among the poor. Despite its nationwide expansion and documented benefits, few studies have critically examined the program's implementation effectiveness across diverse regional contexts. This study employs a qualitative case study design, drawing on secondary data from national statistical agencies and official government reports, complemented by in-depth interviews with local officials, program implementers, and recipient households. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify key challenges and outcomes. The findings indicate that while PKH has positively impacted education participation and health service access among beneficiaries, its effectiveness is constrained by administrative weaknesses, including inconsistent beneficiary targeting, limited public awareness, and fragmented coordination between institutions. Regions with stronger infrastructure and proactive governance demonstrate better outcomes, whereas remote and underdeveloped areas continue to face significant implementation barriers. The study provides policy recommendations to strengthen data verification systems, enhance community engagement, and improve inter-agency coordination. By addressing these challenges, the program can become a more effective tool in achieving long-term poverty alleviation. This research contributes to the broader discourse on social policy effectiveness and offers practical insights for optimizing conditional cash transfer programs in developing countries.

Keywords: *Family Hope Program, Poverty, Indonesia, Optimization, Public Policy.*

1. Introduction

Poverty in Indonesia is not just a socioeconomic issue; it is a structural reality that influences every aspect of public life. It restricts access to basic needs such as quality education, healthcare, and decent livelihoods, while simultaneously breeding cycles of inequality that are passed from one generation to the next. Despite national efforts to promote economic development and reduce poverty, significant disparities remain across regions, especially in outer islands and rural areas. These disparities threaten the achievement of inclusive and sustainable development, as envisioned in Indonesia's long-term national strategies.

As a response, the Indonesian government has implemented a series of social protection programs, most notably the Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH), a conditional cash transfer initiative launched in 2007. PKH aims to reduce poverty by providing financial support to poor families under the condition that they enroll their children in school and regularly access health services. Over time, the program has expanded both in scope and budget. According to national data, the number of PKH recipient families increased from 10.2 million in 2020 to 11 million in 2023, encompassing more than 47 million individuals. The program's annual budget rose from 37.4 trillion IDR to 45.3 trillion IDR during the same period. Despite this, the national poverty rate declined only modestly from 9.78 percent to 9.32 percent. This suggests that financial input alone does not guarantee optimal outcomes, and that effectiveness depends greatly on how the program is implemented across diverse regional contexts.

>>>Table 1<<<

Existing literature provides critical insights into PKH's achievements and limitations. Nugroho and Prabowo (2020) highlighted that PKH improved household expenditure capacity and access to education, while Suryani (2021) noted that the program significantly enhanced maternal and child health practices among recipient families. Zubaidah (2022) emphasized PKH's role as a central pillar of Indonesia's social welfare policy, showing its contribution to long-term human capital development. Mardiah et al. (2024), however, pointed out that although poverty is declining, there are lingering structural issues in program delivery such as inaccurate beneficiary data, weak monitoring systems, and limited socialization at the local level. Moreover, the International Labour Organization (2020) reported that only 44.1 percent of the population in the Asia-Pacific region benefits from any form of social protection, highlighting that Indonesia's challenges reflect broader regional trends.

Theoretical frameworks also offer valuable lenses to interpret PKH's function and effectiveness. Dependency theory (Frank, 1969; Santos, 1970) argues that effective aid must foster long-term independence rather than reinforce passive reliance. Social change theory (Giddens et al., 2017; Durkheim, 1893; Parsons, 1951) explains how structured interventions like conditional transfers can transform behaviors and improve well-being across generations. Social policy theory (Titmuss, 1974; Galbraith, 1971; Ferguson and Woodward, 2009) underscores the role of government in redistributing resources to reduce inequality. Program effectiveness theory (Rossi et al., 2004; Patton, 2008; Kusek and Rist, 2004) stresses that real change requires strong evaluation systems, transparent data, and coordination between stakeholders. While many studies have explored these theories independently, few have integrated them into localized, evidence-based assessments of PKH implementation.

This study occupies a critical niche by bridging macro-level statistics with regional field data to investigate why PKH's impact varies across Indonesia. The novelty lies in its integrated methodology: while most evaluations rely heavily on quantitative metrics, this study draws from in-depth interviews, regional comparisons, and document analysis to examine how infrastructure, governance, and public awareness shape outcomes. The contrast between well-served regions like West Java, Bali, and Yogyakarta, and under-resourced areas like Papua and Nusa Tenggara Timur, offers insight into structural inequalities within the program itself.

The study's primary objective is to evaluate the effectiveness of PKH in reducing poverty and improving access to education and healthcare among the poor. It also aims to identify operational barriers such as inaccurate targeting, limited inter-agency coordination, and ineffective community engagement. Considering that the program's budget rose from 37.4 trillion IDR to 45.3 trillion IDR in just four years, the need for deeper evaluation is urgent. The study intends to offer actionable policy recommendations to enhance program efficiency, monitoring, and regional equity.

>>>Figure 1<<<

>>>Figure 2<<<

Last but not least, this study reveals that although PKH contributes to national poverty reduction, its effectiveness is highly dependent on how well it is implemented in specific regional

contexts. By combining national statistics with localized evidence, the study contributes to the refinement of Indonesia's poverty alleviation strategies. It underscores the importance of adaptive and regionally responsive program models that go beyond financial distribution to address structural inequalities in social protection delivery.

2. Literature review

2.1. Poverty as a Multidimensional Challenge in Indonesia

Poverty in Indonesia persists as a complex, multidimensional challenge that extends far beyond income deprivation. It shapes access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities while reinforcing structural inequality across generations. According to Mardiah et al. (2024), the distribution of poverty is uneven across provinces, with rural and peripheral regions facing persistent socio-economic disadvantage. Limited infrastructure, weak institutional governance, and a lack of comprehensive social protection systems exacerbate these conditions. Addressing poverty therefore requires more than financial intervention; it demands policies that are responsive to the diverse realities of local communities.

The Indonesian government has developed several strategies to alleviate poverty, one of which is the Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH), a conditional cash transfer designed to encourage behavioral change while supporting vulnerable households. By linking financial aid with education and health compliance, PKH seeks to promote long-term human capital development. However, given the complexity of poverty and the diversity of local contexts, the program's implementation needs to be critically examined to understand whether its national design is effective in all regions of Indonesia.

2.2. Conditional Cash Transfers and the Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH)

PKH has received considerable attention as a leading model of conditional cash transfer (CCT) in Indonesia. Several scholars have documented its positive outcomes. Nugroho and Prabowo (2020) showed that PKH improves access to education and reduces school dropout rates among low-income households. Suryani (2021) found that the program significantly enhances access to maternal and child healthcare, particularly in rural settings. Zubaidah (2022) emphasized the role of PKH in supporting the broader agenda of social inclusion, arguing that it contributes meaningfully to the development of human capital and the reduction of intergenerational poverty. Despite these documented benefits, challenges remain. Mardiah et al. (2024) highlighted persistent weaknesses in the targeting process, particularly concerning the accuracy of beneficiary data and regional disparities in implementation quality. The International Labour Organization (2020) provided a broader context by reporting that only 44.1 percent of the population in the Asia-Pacific region is covered by social protection programs. These findings reflect a shared regional challenge and raise questions about the operational resilience and equity of national programs such as PKH when delivered across diverse and decentralized governance structures.

2.3. Theoretical Perspectives on Social Protection and Program Design

The functioning of PKH can be further understood through multiple theoretical lenses. Dependency theory, as articulated by Frank (1969) and Santos (1970), emphasizes the importance of designing aid mechanisms that promote autonomy rather than reinforce dependence. Within the PKH framework, this theory encourages a focus on empowerment through sustained access to education and health services that allow recipients to gradually exit poverty.

Social change theory (Giddens et al., 2017; Durkheim, 1893; Parsons, 1951) frames PKH as a tool for behavioral transformation. Through its conditionality requirements, the program

encourages families to adopt long-term practices that support well-being. Social policy theory (Titmuss, 1974; Galbraith, 1971; Ferguson and Woodward, 2009) provides normative justification for state-led welfare programs, asserting that governments bear responsibility for addressing social inequality. Meanwhile, program effectiveness theory (Rossi et al., 2004; Patton, 2008; Kusek and Rist, 2004) insists that programs must be measured not only by their existence but by their efficiency, outcome tracking, and adaptability to changing conditions.

2.4. Empirical Gaps and the Novel Position of This Study

Although extensive research exists on PKH and conditional cash transfer programs, critical gaps remain. Much of the literature emphasizes national-level outcomes while overlooking how regional disparities in infrastructure, governance, and socio-cultural conditions affect program effectiveness. These generalized evaluations often fail to capture how PKH performs in practice, particularly in remote or underserved areas. This study addresses these limitations by adopting a qualitative case study approach, combining interviews with beneficiaries, local officials, and program implementers, as well as analysis of secondary data and regional policy documents. It explores not only whether PKH meets its objectives but also how contextual barriers influence its delivery and outcomes.

The study's originality lies in its integrative framework, which connects theoretical models with grounded field evidence to examine the operational realities of PKH in diverse local settings. It highlights the need for adaptive implementation strategies, responsive monitoring systems, and stronger administrative coordination. By focusing on local processes rather than aggregated results, the research contributes a more practical understanding of social assistance in decentralized systems. Beyond Indonesia, the findings offer valuable insights for other countries developing or scaling similar programs. This work underscores the importance of designing poverty alleviation initiatives that are inclusive in principle and effective in practice, promoting policies that respond to the lived realities of vulnerable populations.

3. Method

This study employs a qualitative case study design to evaluate the effectiveness and implementation dynamics of the Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH) in reducing poverty across different regions in Indonesia. The qualitative approach is chosen to capture the nuanced, context-specific experiences and perspectives of stakeholders directly involved in the program. A case study framework is particularly suitable for exploring complex social phenomena in real-life settings, allowing for a deeper understanding of implementation processes, institutional interactions, and community-level outcomes (Yin, 2014).

3.1 Data Collection

Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with a purposive sample of key stakeholders. These included PKH beneficiaries, program implementers at the village and district levels, and local government officials. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for open-ended responses while still adhering to a consistent set of guiding themes related to program access, delivery mechanisms, and institutional support. This method ensured the collection of rich, descriptive data that reflect the lived experiences of participants in various regional contexts.

Secondary data were sourced from annual reports issued by the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS), including national and regional poverty indicators,

program funding allocations, and household beneficiary data from 2020 to 2023. These documents provided a macro-level overview of PKH performance and trends, which were later triangulated with primary interview findings to identify patterns, inconsistencies, and region-specific challenges.

3.2 Data Analysis

The data analysis followed a thematic approach, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), involving systematic coding and categorization of interview transcripts and policy documents. Themes were derived both deductively from the research questions and theoretical framework, and inductively from the interview content. This dual approach enabled the identification of recurring patterns as well as contextually embedded issues specific to each case location.

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, triangulation was employed by comparing interview responses with official statistical data and program reports. Member checking was also conducted with selected respondents to validate the interpretations of their inputs. Additionally, notes and memos were maintained throughout the data analysis process to ensure transparency and allow for reflective consideration of emerging themes.

This methodological strategy allowed for a comprehensive exploration of how PKH functions across varied implementation settings, highlighting both the structural strengths and the operational constraints of the program. The findings generated from this approach form the basis for the policy recommendations offered in the concluding section of the study.

Result and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings based on thematic analysis of qualitative data from interviews and secondary sources. Four interrelated themes emerged from the data: (1) regional disparity in program access and outcomes, (2) institutional coordination and policy alignment, (3) community engagement and program awareness, and (4) data accuracy and targeting mechanisms. Each theme is analyzed through empirical findings, theoretical reflection, and academic dialogue to highlight the implications of PKH implementation at both micro and macro levels.

4.1. Regional Disparity in PKH Access and Outcomes

A central finding of this study is the persistent regional disparity in the effectiveness and accessibility of the Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH), particularly between well-governed urban provinces and structurally disadvantaged regions. While PKH is implemented nationwide under uniform guidelines, its impact is not experienced equally across provinces. Interviews conducted in West Java and Yogyakarta revealed consistent access to cash assistance, functional education and healthcare facilities, and responsive local support mechanisms. In contrast, respondents in Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT) and Papua cited repeated delays in fund disbursement, inadequate school and health infrastructure, and logistical constraints due to poor road conditions and limited institutional presence.

>>>Table 2<<<

These qualitative insights are further substantiated by quantitative survey data from four provinces. As shown in **Table 2**, over 90 percent of respondents in West Java and Yogyakarta reported receiving timely disbursements, while this figure dropped to just 52 percent in NTT and 47 percent in Papua. Similarly, access to healthcare was rated above 85 percent in Java but fell

below 50 percent in the eastern regions. Satisfaction with PKH implementation was markedly lower in the underdeveloped provinces, with only 39 percent of respondents in Papua expressing confidence in program effectiveness compared to 84 percent in West Java. These figures are visualized in **Figure 3**, which illustrates the sharp contrasts across key service indicators.

>>>Figure 3<<<

Such disparities reveal that national-level metrics often mask uneven ground-level realities. They confirm that PKH implementation outcomes are not only shaped by centralized policy frameworks but also heavily influenced by regional governance quality, infrastructural development, and administrative responsiveness. This finding builds on the work of Mardiah et al. (2024), who identified systemic barriers in remote areas, and aligns with Titmuss's (1974) assertion that equitable social policy must adapt to local context. Galbraith (1971) also emphasized that program success depends on tailored approaches responsive to regional economic and administrative capacity.

From a theoretical standpoint, these results resonate with program effectiveness theory (Rossi et al., 2004; Patton, 2008), which posits that the success of a social intervention hinges not only on its design but also on its adaptability and the fidelity of implementation. Moreover, the decentralized structure of Indonesia's governance system adds complexity to PKH delivery. Although decentralization was intended to improve local responsiveness, this study reveals that unequal capacity across regions can lead to fragmented and inconsistent implementation, thereby undermining the objectives of the program.

The implications of these findings are significant. First, they underscore the need for regionally adaptive implementation strategies that account for infrastructural disparities and governance constraints. A standardized policy model cannot ensure equitable outcomes in a country as geographically and institutionally diverse as Indonesia. Policymakers must invest in strengthening local administrative capacity, particularly in underserved provinces, and introduce flexibility in resource allocation to allow context-sensitive adjustments. Additionally, incorporating performance-based budgeting or community-based monitoring may help address local bottlenecks more effectively.

4.2. Institutional Coordination and Policy Alignment

Another key finding of this study highlights the structural limitations in institutional coordination and policy alignment during the implementation of the Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH). While the central government has established detailed procedural guidelines, the translation of these procedures into effective action at the district and village levels remains inconsistent. Field interviews revealed significant confusion and fragmentation among implementing agencies. In several regions, social workers, education officers, and local administrative units operated with unclear role definitions, leading to overlapping responsibilities and procedural delays. These issues were particularly acute in areas with low digital literacy, weak bureaucratic infrastructure, or minimal inter-agency communication channels.

This lack of synchronized coordination affects critical aspects of program delivery, including beneficiary verification, compliance monitoring, and fund disbursement. Respondents frequently described situations where the absence of joint planning or timely information sharing between agencies caused administrative bottlenecks. In some cases, PKH facilitators reported receiving conflicting directives from multiple government offices, which undermined their confidence and

hampered their ability to execute field-level duties efficiently. These observations indicate that, while national leadership and funding mechanisms are well-articulated, the operationalization of the program at the local level remains fragmented and under-resourced.

This finding lends empirical support to Ferguson and Woodward (2009), who argue that local institutional capacity is a critical determinant of the success of national welfare policies. While existing theoretical frameworks, such as those presented by Rossi et al. (2004) and Kusek and Rist (2004), emphasize the importance of robust monitoring and evaluation systems, this study extends the discourse by demonstrating that such systems are unlikely to function effectively in the absence of both horizontal and vertical coordination. Monitoring mechanisms must be supported by integrated planning, communication protocols, and shared accountability structures among implementing agencies.

Furthermore, this study reveals a structural misalignment between national-level policy intent and ground-level realities. Despite clear policy mandates and sufficient budget allocations, the lack of capacity-building programs, digital infrastructure, and inter-sectoral synergy undermines the delivery of benefits to eligible households. This disconnection illustrates the classic problem of "policy-practice gaps," where centrally designed programs fail to accommodate the institutional heterogeneity and bureaucratic limitations of decentralized governance systems.

The implications of these findings are twofold. First, there is an urgent need to institutionalize coordination platforms at the district and sub-district levels, where multiple stakeholders can regularly engage in planning, problem-solving, and joint decision-making. Second, capacity-building initiatives must prioritize training for frontline facilitators, clarify inter-agency roles, and promote shared data systems to reduce redundancies and procedural conflict. Without such structural reforms, even well-designed programs may continue to underperform due to systemic inefficiencies at the implementation stage.

4.3. Community Engagement and Public Awareness

One of the most persistent patterns observed in this study is the limited understanding among beneficiaries regarding the objectives and conditional requirements of the Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH). This challenge was particularly evident in communities with minimal facilitator engagement and sporadic communication. Interviews with first-time recipients and elderly caregivers frequently revealed confusion about the compliance standards, such as required school attendance, health check-ups, and documentation. In contrast, in villages where facilitators consistently disseminated information and built personal rapport with beneficiaries, participants were more likely to meet compliance expectations in a timely manner.

These findings underscore that community engagement is vital not only for the initiation of the program but also for sustaining its effectiveness. In many areas, a single PKH facilitator was responsible for multiple administrative zones, resulting in infrequent visits and insufficient time to cultivate trust or offer ongoing support. Conversely, where facilitators maintained consistent interaction with communities, beneficiaries felt more informed, confident, and motivated to participate. The study emphasizes that effective program delivery requires more than just information transfer; it depends on the depth of human relationships, local credibility, and trust.

This insight extends previous work by Zubaidah (2022), who argues that socialization is crucial for the long-term viability of welfare programs. However, the present study advances this discussion by showing that public awareness is not merely a matter of communication frequency but also of engagement quality. The process must be dialogic, participatory, and sustained. Drawing on the principles of participatory development theory (Chambers, 1994), it becomes clear

that communities respond more effectively when they are included as partners rather than treated as passive recipients of aid.

The data also highlight how limited public awareness can reinforce existing inequalities. Vulnerable groups, including elderly caretakers, individuals with disabilities, or residents of culturally distinct regions, are at greater risk of exclusion when information is inconsistently delivered. According to Sen's capabilities approach (1999), empowerment requires not only economic resources but also access to knowledge and the agency to act upon it. When engagement strategies fail to reach marginalized populations, the very communities most in need of assistance may be unintentionally left behind.

From a policy standpoint, the findings call for stronger investment in the role and training of PKH facilitators. Many currently operate with limited resources, unclear job scopes, and heavy workloads that limit their ability to engage meaningfully with beneficiaries. It is essential to enhance their capacity through specialized communication training, culturally responsive materials, and manageable service areas. These improvements will foster more inclusive and responsive program delivery at the grassroots level.

4.4 Data Accuracy and Targeting Mechanisms

A recurring concern raised by both beneficiaries and frontline implementers relates to the continued inaccuracy of household targeting within the Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH). Field interviews revealed multiple instances of inclusion and exclusion errors. Several households that fell below the poverty line were not registered to receive benefits, while others whose economic conditions had improved remained active on beneficiary lists. These errors have generated dissatisfaction among communities and reduced the perceived legitimacy of the program. In many cases, participants attributed the problem to the use of outdated databases and the absence of mechanisms for real-time verification.

This finding points to a systemic challenge in the data management infrastructure of social protection systems. While policies are designed to be inclusive and evidence-based, their actual impact is constrained when beneficiary data is not regularly updated or locally validated. Local officials reported that updating household eligibility information involved cumbersome administrative procedures and long waiting times. The lack of integration between central databases and field-level inputs further delayed corrections, weakening the program's responsiveness to shifting socio-economic realities. This study highlights that administrative inertia in data systems directly affects the efficiency and fairness of social assistance distribution. These findings resonate with earlier calls by Patton (2008) and Kusek and Rist (2004), who stress the critical role of data quality in driving effective program design and evaluation. However, this research advances the discussion by emphasizing that data alone is insufficient unless coupled with institutional mechanisms that enable continuous, localized verification. Static databases become liabilities when not supported by feedback loops from field actors who are closest to the lived realities of the targeted population. The findings offer an original contribution by foregrounding the potential of digital integration and community-led validation as key instruments for improving targeting accuracy.

The ethical dimension of this issue is also significant. As Titmuss (1974) argued, social policy must be both ethically grounded and administratively competent. When misallocation persists due to outdated data, it not only misuses public funds but also perpetuates injustices among those most in need. In a context where poverty is dynamic and regionally diverse, precision in identifying

eligible households is not a technical luxury but a moral imperative. Therefore, policy frameworks must be designed to support agile, transparent, and participatory data practices.

In terms of programmatic implications, this study suggests the need to overhaul existing data verification protocols by leveraging digital platforms that allow for dynamic household tracking. Incorporating mobile-based applications for real-time updates and encouraging active participation from community leaders can create a more accurate and trusted targeting mechanism. Local governments should be given greater autonomy and technical support to maintain and validate beneficiary records, enabling them to respond promptly to demographic and economic changes.

4.5 Operational Gaps and Strategic Implications of PKH Implementation

This study reinforces the strategic role of the Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH) in reducing poverty and fostering social inclusion, particularly when supported by robust institutional and infrastructural systems. However, it identifies a critical shortcoming in the program's one-size-fits-all implementation model, which often fails to accommodate the administrative, cultural, and geographical differences that shape local outcomes. Whereas previous studies have prioritized macro-level indicators, this research highlights the equally vital role of micro-level factors such as local governance, community dynamics, and delivery mechanisms.

The novelty of this study lies in its qualitative and process-focused approach, uncovering operational frictions that hinder the program's transformative potential. By moving beyond aggregated data, it offers a contextualized view of how social protection functions in decentralized environments. This perspective provides practical value for policymakers seeking to design adaptive, inclusive, and responsive poverty alleviation systems (Patton, 2008; Kusek & Rist, 2004; Titmuss, 1974).

Future research should extend comparative analyses across more varied ecological and socio-political regions, including conflict-affected and disaster-prone areas. Longitudinal studies are also needed to assess behavioral changes in beneficiaries, especially regarding continued education and healthcare usage beyond program cycles. Furthermore, the integration of digital platforms for real-time data tracking and feedback loops between implementers and recipients warrants further exploration.

In summary, the findings underscore the importance of embedding social protection programs like PKH within adaptive governance structures. Strengthening inter-agency coordination, ensuring regular data updates, and fostering community engagement are essential steps toward delivering equitable and context-sensitive outcomes across Indonesia's diverse regions.

5. Conclusion

Program This study confirms that the Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH) has played an important role in reducing poverty in Indonesia, particularly by improving access to education and healthcare among disadvantaged populations. However, the impact of the program remains uneven across regions due to several critical implementation gaps. The key findings indicate that access to benefits is significantly lower in remote provinces where infrastructure is weak and institutional capacity is limited. In addition, the lack of coordination among implementing agencies and the absence of clear role definitions have resulted in fragmented service delivery and delays. The study also identifies low levels of public awareness and inadequate facilitator outreach as contributing factors to non-compliance and underutilization of benefits among eligible households. Furthermore, inaccuracies in beneficiary data, caused by outdated databases and limited field

verification, have led to both inclusion and exclusion errors. These results imply that financial resources alone are not sufficient to ensure program success. Instead, effective poverty alleviation requires a context-sensitive strategy that enhances administrative capacity, builds integrated data systems for real-time validation, and strengthens community engagement. By offering grounded insights into the operational dynamics of PKH, this study provides valuable guidance for policymakers to design more adaptive, inclusive, and responsive social protection programs across Indonesia's diverse regions.

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