

The Role of Public Policy Communication in Poverty Alleviation

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Received: 24 March 2023 Accepted: 4 August 2023 Published: 5 August 2023

Abstract

Poverty alleviation has become one of key global agendas for achieving sustainable development goals. Implementation of poverty alleviation programs, however, is often impeded by poor public policy communication. This study evaluates how public policy communication helps ensure the successful implementation of the programs, by reviewing (a) the importance of public policy communication, (b) the type of communication strategies implemented, and (c) the results gained. Using qualitative descriptive method, the authors review communication practices and results in Indonesia and other countries.

Keywords: Poverty eradication, government, sustainable development, millennium, communication.

Introduction

In 2022 Indonesia saw a slight increase in its poverty level, taking place not only in rural but also in urban areas (Ministry of Finance, 2023). In September 2022, as much as 26.36 million people (9.57%) were identified as being in low-income category. This number is slightly higher than the number in March of the same year, which was 9.54%, but lower than the number identified in September 2021, which was 9.71%. The poverty level in the urban areas in March 2022 rose to 7.53% meanwhile in the rural areas increased to 12.36%. Head of Ministry of Finance's Fiscal

Policy Agency, Febrio Kacaribu, stated that by increasing energy subsidies would be one of the ways to prevent the poverty rate from increasing significantly. “The Government’s effort to push inclusivity in economic growth can be seen from the decreasing number of inequalities in both urban and rural areas. In fact, inequality in rural areas also continues to show improvement compared to pre-pandemic levels” (Ministry of Finance, 2023). Acknowledging that 14 of 38 provinces are lagging behind in poverty alleviation, President Joko Widodo sets a national target that by 2024 Indonesia’s extremes poverty level should be brought down to zero (Yanwardhana, 2023).

Data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) shows that the percentage of low-income people in September 2022 was 9.57%, an increase of 0.03% from March 2022. The total number of low-income people in September 2022 was 26.36 million people, an increase of 0.02 million people from March 2022. The BPS also recorded an increasing percentage of low-income people in urban areas from 7.50% (11.82 million people) in March 2022 to 12.29% (11.98 million people) in September 2022. The same phenomenon happened in rural areas, with an increase from 14.34 million people in March 2022 to 14.38 million people in September 2022. The poverty line in September 2022 was Rp535,547.00/capita/month that consists of the food poverty line of Rp397,125.00 (74.15%) and non-food poverty line of Rp138,422.00 (25.85%). In September 2022, poor households in Indonesia had an average of 4.34 household members. Thus, the poverty line per poor household on average is Rp2,324,274.00/poor household/month (BPS, 2023).

The United Nations place poverty alleviation as one of the main challenges to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This program is expected to finish in 2030. However, during the implementation, poverty eradication program has some obstacles. As an example, Ikem, U. Victor, Akiyanto, and B. Johnson (2022) observed that poverty eradication program in Nigeria

was impeded by both political and economic obstacles, and in some cases by poor public policy communication. Therefore, public policy communication plays a crucial role for the successful implementation of various poverty alleviation programs. If communication gap happens, whether among government agencies, or between the governments and the community, poverty alleviation programs may become poorly managed and their target may become unattainable.

This study aims to evaluate how public policy communication helps ensure the successful implementation of its poverty alleviation programs. The authors attempt to address the following policy questions: (a) how important is public policy communication for poverty alleviation programs? (b) what communication strategies are implemented? and (c) what are the results gained? The authors review communication practices in Indonesia and other countries.

Methods

This research was conducted by qualitative descriptive approach method. Kirl and Miller as quoted by Maleong (2002) explain that qualitative research is a particular tradition in social sciences. This kind of research method is fundamentally dependent on the researcher's observations in a particular area. It is called a qualitative descriptive research because the data analyzed rejects or does not accept the hypothesis. So the form of this research is descriptive qualitative research.

Qualitative descriptive approach does not need hypothetical testing, does not change, add and manipulate. Based on Nazir explained by Mulyadi (2012:74), doing descriptive research with a qualitative approach means the data was collected through written words, trying to get or obtain in-depth information from all collected information. Qualitative can also be a tool to refute existing theories. A theory is needed for its capacity to give conceptual understanding that is connected

with the research's focus. The qualitative was implemented with existing concepts then blended with techniques and concepts that appear during the data collection process (Neuman, 2018). Qualitative and descriptive approaches become general procedures in research from various sciences that aim to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics by prioritizing how, why and what is being studied (Nassaji, 2015).

The data source in qualitative research as explained by H.B Sutopo (2002) can come from humans, the answers to questions, behaviors, documents, archives and other things. Lofland as quoted by Lexi J. Moleong (2001) explains that words, behavior and actions are the main data sources, while documents or archives can be additional data that is often very important.

In this study the authors use two data sources. The first is informant, which is a person who has a certain scientific background and can be trusted to be a source of data. Second, documents and archives related to poverty data in Indonesia.

Results and Discussions

Poverty in the Handbook on Poverty and Inequality composed by the World Bank is the economic inability to fulfill the basic needs, both food and non-food, that is measured from the expense side (Nurhadi, 2022). A community can be categorized as poor if their average expense per capita per month is below the poverty line between food and non-food poverty line. The world bank set the poverty line at \$2.15 US dollars per day. Those who live below the aforementioned poverty line are considered as an extremely poor community (Haughton, J and Khandker, S., 2010). If the conversion value of one dollar to rupiah is Rp14,000, then the community with an expense value of Rp32,486.8225 per day is included as a poor category.

Communities that are grouped in the poor category consist of people from urban and rural areas with various professions, such as farmer, fisherman, labor and other professions with minimal income. Basically, those who are grouped as low-income communities are the communities that have not been touched by the government's policies. In the last 50 years, Indonesia is considered to have achieved significant economic growth. However, this growth rate may not necessarily be associated with the growth of life standards as the fourth most densely populated country in the world. Nobel prize winner, Angus Deaton, and world-known analyst, Ravallion, explained that "The greatest running in human history is running from poverty and death". Meanwhile Ravallion said that "Economics lessons seem oddly separated from their implementation in real world problems like poverty" (Hill, 2021). A study conducted in the 1960s categorized Indonesia as the poorest country; almost 70% of the people of Java and Nusa Tenggara were malnourished. However, in the late 1960s, Indonesia's economy was considered to have rapid growth with the quality of the country's statistics (Hill, 2021).

In particular period of time, Carina Mood (2015), the correspondent of Institute for Future Studies, studied poverty in her journal mostly based on longitudinal survey data, which are social researches that compare the alteration of research's subject post particular period and long-period research. Through this approach, the measurement of poverty rate is towards a short-term phenomenon. Those who are categorized as poor can be deemed as not poor anymore within a year, but half of those who are categorized as poor may have the same condition (poor) in many years ahead.

There are a lot of reasons why poverty exists. Booth and McCawley (1981) conveyed that almost all countries have increasing welfare if measured with their expense per capita. However, this increment can only be enjoyed by a small number of people in the community (Kadji, 2013).

Understanding the characteristics of the poverty line is an imperative thing to be identified. Generally, the poor are characterized by their inability to fulfill daily needs, both primary and secondary.

Sharp in Hapsoro (2020) explained that there are several causes that lead to poverty. On a micro level, poverty exists because of the unequal resource ownership pattern. This condition creates unequal income distribution. Limited and low quality of resources can also be the characteristics of the poor. Low resources definitely lead to low wages, which causes unfortunate fate or standard of living.

Table 1. Poverty in Indonesia in September 2022 (BPS, 2023)

- The percentage of low-income people in September 2022 was 9.57%, which rose 0.03% from March 2022 but declined 0.14% from September 2021.
- Total number of low-income people in September 2022 was 26.36 million people, which increased 0.20 million people from March 2022 but decreased 0.14 million people from September 2021.
- The percentage of low-income people in urban areas in March 2022 was 7.50% and increased to 7.53% in September 2022. Meanwhile the percentage of low-income people in rural areas in March 2022 was 12.29% and increased to 12.36% in September 2022.
- Compared to March 2022, the number of low-income people in urban areas in September 2022 rose as much as 0.16 million people (from 11.82 million people in March 2022 to 11.98 million people in September 2022). Meanwhile in the same period of time, the number of low-income people in rural areas increased as much as 0.04 million people (from 14.34 million people in March 2022 to 14.38 million people in September 2022).
- The poverty line in September 2022 was Rp535,547.00/capita/month which consists of Food Poverty Line as much as Rp397,125.00 (74.15%) and Non-Food Poverty Line as much as Rp138,422.00 (25.85%).
- In September 2022, poor households in Indonesia had an average of 4.34 household members. Thus, the poverty line per poor household on average is Rp2,324,274.00/poor household/month.

Public policy communication

As many as 193 countries of the United Nations (the UN) agreed that poverty eradication was set as the main agenda of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)'s program which was targeted to finish in 2030. Several countries including Indonesia are determined to eradicate all

forms of poverty anywhere. This agreement was finalized in September 2015. Therefore since 2015, the publication of poverty eradication has significantly increased. In the past years, several developing countries paid special attention to communication patterns to elevate the effectiveness of poverty eradication policies and strategies (Yu and Huang, 2021).

Communication patterns have a prominent role in promoting knowledge, social inclusion and social development programs. Within the framework of the poverty eradication program, mass media usage as a communication tool is very helpful in achieving the goal of the poverty eradication program. People's awareness and knowledge, their support to poverty eradication programs, and invitation to participate in the program can be socialized through mass media to the community. This of course can be done through mass media channels that can reach people in remote rural areas and effectively. Communication should use all media platforms, such as television, radio, printed media and online media, especially the ones that can reach people in rural areas. In fact, communication can be done through social media or new media devices that are independent and free of political influence of the interest of those in power or capital owners. Media development theory should be adopted as the base of media participation in poverty eradication programs, so that every country who has this program should have a separate budget allocation as a means of strategy to implement communication for poverty eradication programs (Johnson, Akintayo and Victor, 2022).

Mass media as a tool to communicate poverty eradication programs has been used in several developing countries. Some studies were conducted to test the role of communication in the poverty eradication program, for example the ones conducted by Chudasama and Singh (2020) or Aderogba (2012). They analyze mass media usage as a communication tool in the poverty

eradication program in Nigeria. The conclusion of the study was that communication through mass media will increase the awareness and role of the community in the poverty eradication program. In 2017, Sajitha Lakmali Hewapathirana studied a television program in Sri Lanka in the making of documentary movies related to poverty. She studied the factors that affected the producers in a television program in choosing the news angle for poverty and low-income people in rural areas. Her study was conducted at the time by the Sri Lankan government prioritizing the promotion of poverty eradication programs through media. Hewapathirana concluded that television's role in delivering the information regarding poverty in Sri Lankan rural areas is still not optimal and needs to be improved. The goal is to provide sufficient knowledge to the community so that they want to participate in poverty eradication programs.

Public policy communication in Indonesia

In the limited meeting of *Kabinet Indonesia Maju* on March 4th 2020, President Joko Widodo emphasized that Indonesian government should have a commitment to finish the extreme poverty eradication program in 2024. This target is 6 years faster than the agreed target by 193 UN countries in September 2015, which was agreed to be finished in 2030.

The acceleration efforts in reducing poverty in Indonesia has been the main program of the Indonesian government since 2010. Former president at that period, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, created a national team for the acceleration of poverty eradication (*Tim Nasional Percepatan Penanggulangan Kemiskinan/TNP2K*). This team was formed under the Presidential Regulation number 15, 2010 regarding the Acceleration of Poverty Eradication. Later on, this regulation was renewed in President Joko Widodo's period under the Presidential Regulation number 96, 2015. This presidential regulation also stipulated that TNP2K will be led by the vice president.

When COVID-19 pandemic happened, Indonesian government determination to eradicate poverty did not subside. In fact, President Joko Widodo strengthened the extreme poverty eradication program by publishing Presidential Instruction number 4 year 2022 regarding the Acceleration of Extreme Poverty Eradication (*Percepatan Penghapusan Kemiskinan Ekstrem/PPKE*). Vice president of Indonesia as the leader of TNP2K was pointed out as the executor of Presidential Instruction number 4 year 2022. This presidential instruction also assigns 22 ministries and 6 institutions, including the governmental bodies in provincial, district and city level to jointly implement the extreme poverty eradication (PPKE) program. This program is targeted to finish on December 31st 2024.

Following the Presidential Instruction no 4 year 2022, TNP2K held a sharing knowledge session with the theme “Overseeing the acceleration of extreme poverty eradication program 2024” on October 19th 2022. This event was held in the Vice President Secretariat Auditorium by involving the Bureau of Pers, Media and Information and the Vice President Secretariat. A total of 28 public relations representatives from a number of institutions and ministries and journalists from several mass media were invited to this event. This event was done to disseminate information related to the government's programs in order to accelerate the eradication of extreme poverty.

The Ministry of National Development Planning also compiled the manual book for communication strategy to achieve sustainable development goals. This book consisted of the goals and guidelines of communication strategy in conveying suggestions and messages of SDGs and the effective media as a communication channel to disseminate information related to poverty eradication programs to the community. When this book was compiled, Indonesia had finished 49

of 67 indicators of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). One of several indicators that should be continued was the reduction of the poverty rate based on the national poverty line.

The Indonesian government's efforts to continue the target of completing MDGs' indicators were hampered during COVID-19 pandemic. Some indicators that have been targeted were corrected and modified due to the pandemic, some even had significant correction. COVID-19 pandemic first came to Indonesia in 2020. The poverty rate which was previously reduced to single digit was returned to double digits due to the pandemic. However, this constraint did not stop the Indonesian government from achieving SDGs' indicators. Several breakthrough innovations were taken including by maximizing the usage of communication and media (The Ministry of National Development Planning, 2020).

The Achievement Implementation Report of Sustainable Development Goals 2021 by the Ministry of National Development Planning stated that the extreme poverty rate in 2021 was successfully reduced to 4.0%. This rate exceeded the set target. In the period of time between 2015 and 2021, the extreme poverty rate was reduced from 7.2% in March 2015 to 4.0% in March 2021.

Conclusion

COVID-19 pandemic hampered the Indonesian government in completing the targets from SDGs indicators. The poverty rate in 2019 that can be reduced to single digit suddenly increased to double digits. Several actions were taken to achieve SDGs' targets in time. After President Joko Widodo published the Presidential Instruction no 4 year 2022 on October 19th 2022, TNP2K did a sharing knowledge session by inviting 28 public relation representatives from several institutions and ministries and also journalists from several mass media. The Ministry of National

Development Planning also compiled a manual book regarding the Communication Strategy to Achieve Sustainable Development Goals.

The result is the extreme poverty rate in 2021 was successfully decreased to 4.0%. This rate exceeded the set target. In the period of time between 2015 and 2021, the extreme poverty rate was reduced from 7.2% in March 2015 to 4.0% in March 2021.

Meanwhile, based on the Central Bureau of Statistics Indonesia, the percentage of low-income people in Indonesia in March 2022 was set to 9.54% or declined 0.17 points compared to the percentage in September 2021 which was 9.71%. This percentage was also better than September 2020 which was 10.19% and March 2021 which was 10.14%.

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