

Social Protection in Developing Countries: Contributions of Social Protection to Resolving the Problem of Poverty and Vulnerability



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Abstract

The Covid-19 and global recession increased uncertainty at macro and micro levels. Social protection was designed as a short response to these crises. This paper examines the coverage of social protection and its potential contribution in solving poverty and vulnerabilities in developing countries. This paper also investigates the experience of Indonesia in implementing social protection programs to reduce poverty and prevent vulnerable groups from poverty and other deprivation. This paper found that social protection plays significant contributions to resolving the problem of poverty and vulnerability in developing countries since social protection contribute to economic growth, the fulfilment of human rights, increase human development, create social and political stability, prevent the slide into poverty and eliminate discrimination and marginalization. The experience of Indonesia in implementing social protection program shows considerable progress in improving the welfare of the people in poverty and vulnerable groups. There is considerable room for improvement as there are some gaps in the implementation of social protection programs including lack of coordination and synergies among the existing programmes, small coverage, financial sustainability, cost of administration, targeting issues, compliance and policy driven.

Key Words: Social protection, poverty, developing countries, vulnerabilities and Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

One of the major problems in developing countries is the high incidence of poverty. Poverty is maintained as the main root of many social problems faced by developing countries such as human trafficking, child labour, and illegal lodging. Social policy through social protection has widely becoming a policy framework implemented to solve problem of poverty and vulnerabilities in developing countries. The significance of social protection is now widely accepted and become necessary in any society because the growth benefits do not reach all people, because people do not have the same capability to deal with shocks, and because all people are vulnerable at different points in their lifecycle (Handayani 2010, p. 37).

Social protection is claimed effective and powerful tools to solve the problem of poverty and vulnerabilities. A body of evidence in literature examines the design of social protection programs as an effective measure to reduce poverty and prevent vulnerable groups from poverty and deprivation. Barrientos (2011, p. 248), for instance, describes social protection particularly social assistance through income transfer has positive impact on poverty reduction and increase human development index. Similarly, Simanjuntak and Widjaja (2010, p. 162) found that social protection has positive impact on decreasing the number of poverty and improving the social condition of vulnerable groups in Indonesia. Ortiz and Yablonski (2010, p. 36) found that social protection is a powerful instrument to alleviate poverty and inequality as it reduced poverty in many developed countries by more than 50% up to 2009. World Bank also reports that social protection particularly unconditional cash transfer was successful in solving problems in the aftermath of natural disasters in turkey and some low income countries (World Bank 2012, p. 1).

Despite these findings, social protection is relatively expensive and needs adequate policy design and sufficient funds challenging developing and low income countries to implement it. The mean cost of a basic package of social protection including a universal pension covering old age, disability and a child benefit, would spend around two to three percent of GDP (Barrientos & Hulme 2008, p. 440). As a result, the social protection is often designed to respond an emergency and crisis situation. The 2008 financial crisis and consequent global recession, for instance, increased uncertainty at macro and micro levels. For people in poverty and vulnerable groups had been pushed into poverty or more dangerous situations. Social protection was designed as a short response to these crises. However, this paper argues that social protection is not only applicable to response crisis and emergency issues but also play significant contribution to solve problem of poverty, inequality and vulnerabilities in developing country. This paper will examine the coverage of social protection and its potential contribution in solving poverty and vulnerabilities in developing countries. This paper also will examine the experience of Indonesia in implementing social protection programs to reduce poverty and prevent vulnerable groups from poverty and other deprivation.

The Coverage of Social Protection

The conception of social protection is varied. International Labour Organization (ILO), for instance, defines social protection as “a range of public institutions, norms and programmes aimed at protecting workers and their house-holds from contingencies threatening basic living standards” (Barrientos 2011, p. 240). This definition is too narrow as the beneficiaries of social protection are only workers and their families. World Bank defines social protection in a broader concept in term of beneficiaries covering individuals, household and communities. World Bank defines social protection as “social risk management and proposes policies that seek to assist individuals, households and communities in better managing income risks’ (Holzmann & Jorgensen 1999, p. 4). This conceptualization of social protection as social risk management became dominant perspective in the last few decades. However, the conceptualization of social protection is now extended to basic human needs and capabilities approaches.

Similarly, the UN defines social protection as ‘a set of public and private policies and programmes undertaken by societies in response to various contingencies to offset the absence or substantial reduction of income from work; to provide assistance to families with children as well as provide people with basic health care and housing’ (United Nations 2000, p. 4).

Asian development Bank differentiates social protection with poverty reduction, general growth and social development programs such as basic nutrition, vocational training, health, and educational services, as well as community development. Social protection is defined as “the set of policies and programs that enable vulnerable groups to prevent, reduce, and/or cope with risks, and that is targeted at the vulnerable groups; involve cash or in-kind transfers; and are not activities that are usually associated with other sectors, such as rural development, basic infrastructure, health, and education.” (ADB 2010, p 506).

This paper disagrees to differentiate social protection with poverty reduction and social development program proposed by Asian Development Bank. This paper argues that the main purpose of social protection is to prevent and to overcome the problem of poverty and vulnerabilities. Based on this purpose, I would argue that social protection and poverty reduction is similar. Social protection also cannot be separated from social development programs as the objective is the same to reduce poverty (Correl 2008, p. 455). Micro finance program for instance is social development program aimed to reduce poverty which is also claimed as social protection program (Barrientos 2011, p. 245).

This paper also argues that social protection practice has also developed time to time where previously social protection approach focused on short term social safety nets and social funds which is now extended to much broader set of policies and programmes combining interventions aimed to protect basic levels of consumption among poor households and promote human capital investment and other productive assets as well as strengthening the institutions of those in poverty so their capability to solve their problems are increased (Barrientos & Hulme 2008, p. 3). This argument shows that social protection now covers social development programs.

Shepherd et.al (2004) classifies social protection as both an approach and a set of policies. As an approach, social protection focuses on reducing risk and vulnerabilities of individuals, households and communities, as well as includes all interventions from public, private and voluntary organisations and informal networks such as individuals transferring resources to friends and family to prevent, manage and overcome risks and vulnerabilities. Vulnerability can be defined as “the probability that individuals, households or communities will be in poverty in the future” (Barrientos 2011, p. 242).

Moreover, social protection is grouped differently among scholars. Widjaja and Simanjuntak (2010,p. 160), for instance, divided social protection into social security and social assistance whereas ILO divides social protection into three groups including social insurance, social assistance and labour market regulation (Barrientos 2011, p. 241). Asian Development Bank classified social protection into five major elements including labour markets, social insurance, social assistance, micro and area-based schemes to protect communities, and child protection (ADB 2010, p. 211).

Social security refers to social insurances, including health and pension insurance, maternity, unemployment benefits, work injury insurance and disability grants. Social insurance is mostly financed from contributions of the participants (workers and employers). In contrast, social assistance is non-contributory procedures targeted at poor people and other vulnerable groups such as elderly and disable person. Social assistance is tax financed. Labour market regulation refers to standards aimed to ensure basic rights at work and extend rights to the workers’ organisation.

The Potential Contribution of Social Protection to Resolving The Problem of Poverty and Vulnerability in Developing Countries

Social protection has tremendous impacts in solving the problem of poverty and vulnerabilities in developing countries. The first contribution of social protection to solve problem of poverty and vulnerability is that it become a tool in achieving human rights. The implementation of social protection policy is seen as the manifestation of the role of state to fulfil the rights of its citizen. In welfare state perspective, the fulfilment of citizen's rights is the obligation of state (Suharto 2008). State has responsibility to provide adequate standard of living as adequate standard of living is basic rights of people. Another rights fulfilled by the state through social protection program are health, social security and education rights.

Those rights are acknowledged by the international community as basic rights of people as stated in universal declaration of human rights (UDHR) and its covenants including International Covenant on Civil and Political Right and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Barientos & Hulme 2008, p. 445). Article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: "Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security" (UN 1948).

Article 25 states:

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection" (UN 1948).

Work injury insurance program is an example of the social protection programs aimed to fulfil the rights of citizen on health. Conditional cash transfer program is an example of the social protection program aimed to fulfil the rights of children on education. In conditional cash transfer program, the child beneficiary from poor family is obliged to attend school as a requirement to get cash transfer. Therefore, the cash transfer used to access education services. Education is believed as an effective strategy to eradicate poverty.

The fulfilment of citizen's rights or basic human needs is now becoming new approach in social protection. This approach is known as right based approach that moves perspective of social protection as policy option to an obligation of states and international governance structure (Barientos & Hulme 2008, p. 453). Previously, the dominant

perspective in social protection conceptualization is social risk management. As social risk management, social protection insists on integrated system of protective measures against risks aimed to mitigate the negative impact of economic shock. Social safety net program is an example of social protection program aimed to mitigate the negative impact of economic shock. It tends to be temporal as it is designed to respond adverse effect of economic shock or other emergency issues (Widjaya & Simanjuntak 2010, p. 159).

The fulfilment of rights is often associated with welfare. Welfare is often defined as a condition where the basic needs of people are fulfilled (Midgley 1995). Therefore, the fulfilled rights means not in poverty. This basic concept of fulfilment people's rights through social protection program becomes strategic perspective to solve the problem of poverty and vulnerability.

The second contribution of social protection is that it supports economic growth. In this context, the growth must to be "pro poor". Social protection provide protection both to the 'active poor' by facilitating them to take part more productively in economic activity, and to the less active poor, with substantial benefits for society as a whole. Participate in economic activity contribute to economic growth. ADB (2011) argue that social protection is beneficial to economic growth by encouraging labour markets to support workers to their most productive performance and promoting workers to increase economic activity that might otherwise have proved risky, enabling investments in human capital, and improving labour productivity.

Moreover, economic growth is essential for social protection as it provides both the additional incomes and become public revenues which can be utilized as insurance and for basic social security to improve citizens' quality of life. Social protection through social insurance program can increase participation of labour in economic activity as well as increase labour productivity since the risks and vulnerability is reduced that in turn can increase economic growth. Based on this argument, ILO categorizes labour market policy as part of social protection scheme (Barrientos 2011, p. 244).

Asian Development bank (2012) also maintains that pensions can also enhance economic growth by providing income for individuals. Pension as income for individual can be invested in productive investment, causing older people as producers rather than just consumers. Therefore, some states have pioneer non-contributory pension systems providing cash benefits to older citizens. A body of evidence from research describes the effectiveness of social pension in Bangladesh, India, Mongolia, Nepal, Thailand, and Viet Nam. Those

researches found substantial impacts of pension as part of social protection program on economic development, and the social class of older people within their households and communities (Handayani & Babajanian 2012).

The third contribution is that it contributes significantly to human development. Many social protection programs particularly cash transfer program are aimed to meet the short-term needs of the poorest households, particularly increased consumption and nutrition, and longer-term goals, such as increased education and health as well as a more productive population (Barrientos 2010, p. 235). Those programs contribute in human development that in turn contributed significantly to strengthen human capital, foster employment and development (Ortiz 2007) as well as solving the problem of poverty and vulnerability. Ahmad (1991) as cited by Barrientos claims that countries that put investment in human development shows lower rates deprivation and poverty as well as having more resilience during economic and social transformation. Therefore, investment in social protection is tremendously effective in alleviating poverty and vulnerability, as well as poverty persistence across time and generations. States with stronger social protection show lower rates of poverty and vulnerability, and are more resilient during economic and social transformation (Barrientos 2010, p. 15).

The fourth contribution is preventing people particularly vulnerable groups into poverty. The main aim of social protection is to prevent, mitigate and enhance people's ability to deal with major hazards (Shepherd et.al 2004). Social insurance program is strongly related to preventing people slide into poverty. Work injury scheme is a good example where the workers are prevented from risks of being ill into poverty. This potency has been recognized by international communities manifested in a commitment within post-2015 development agenda. The commitment recognizes the importance of social protection in preventing the slide of people into poverty (Barrientos & Hulme, 2013.).

The fifth contribution of social protection is to eradicate marginalization and discrimination. A good example of this contribution is Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme which is claimed successful in combating social discrimination by offering a minimum employment by right. This scheme was introduced in the state of Maharashtra, India in the early 1980s in response to major droughts in the 1970s (Kabeer et al. 2010, Shepherd et.al 2004).

Women are one of the vulnerable groups who face problems at old age as they lack savings or any form of social security. Another problem of women is facing discrimination in

terms of employment, limited access to resources and services, inheritance and property laws. Social protection program is an attempt to eradicate those marginalization and discrimination. Social protection scheme promotes gender equality. A good example of this is conditional cash transfer which was provided to women in order to access health services. Another good example of this is pension scheme promoting gender equality. Pension program is likely to benefit older women as a matter of fact that women usually have fewer opportunities to save for their old age, and they tend to live longer than men causing women have a longer old age (ADB 2012, p. 133).

Based on this situation, ADB recommend paying attention to gender issues in program design of social protection since the attention can enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of Social Protection and make sure better protection of both men and women. Therefore, gender issues should be an integral part of Social Protection policies, strategies, and programs (ADB 2011).

The sixth contribution of social protection contributes directly to social and political stability. Shepherd et. al (2004) argued that if social protection coverage is wide and distribution of benefit is seen as fair, social protection affect positively to social and political stability. Social and political stability can improve the legitimacy of state. The universal system and rights-based approach can build solidarity and coalitions among classes and groups across generations that in turn have positive impacts on strengthening the contract between the state and citizens (UN Escap 2011).

Poverty and inequities increase the likelihood of social tensions and violent conflict, which ultimately destabilizes governments and regions. Those tensions and conflict cause waves of irregular migration casing them become vulnerable to be victims of human trafficking and people smuggling as well as may increase people's vulnerability to terrorist actions and other forms of criminality (ADB 2010).

Social protection is beneficial in fragile States and those recovering from conflict. Well-designed social protection scheme contribute to social cohesion and promote social citizenship as well as reduce conflict in society that in turn contribute to an effective and secure State. Block grants program in Afghanistan is an example of social protection policy aimed to make stronger community-level governance, repair the damage from three decades of conflict and rebuilding trust between the central Government and its citizens (UN Escap 2011, p. 43).

The practice of social protection in Indonesia: Promising Future for Poverty Reduction

In Indonesia, social protection becomes policy framework to solve the problem of poverty and vulnerabilities. As a policy framework, social protection particularly social security has been introduced since 1968 known as ASKES, a compulsory health insurance program for public servants, followed by ASTEK, a social security program introduced in 1977 for private sector workers and employees of state enterprises. In 1992, Indonesia reformed its social security system through new social security law known as Social Security for Private Employees (JAMSOSTEK). This new social protection scheme provides only floor protection in the formal sector for workers and their families covering savings for old age, death benefits, and benefits for accidents occurring at work or occupational illnesses as well as health-care coverage. Any additional benefits are provided by private insurance (Tambunan & Purwoko 2002, p. 30).

Those social security systems do not cover informal sectors and people in poverty. To cover people in poverty and vulnerable groups, Indonesian Government introduces social assistance programs. Social assistance programs include subsidized rice (Raskin), health fee waivers (Jamkesmas), cash transfers for poor students (BSM), a conditional cash transfer (PKH), and a temporary unconditional cash transfer (BLT). These programs are designed to mitigate the dire impact of economic crises, to support the poor out of poverty, and protect the vulnerable groups slide into poverty.

The coverage of social protection particularly social security has been criticized by many institutions such as International Labour Organization and Smeru Research Institute since the scheme only covers Public servants and formal workers. Those institutions recommend expanding the coverage of social protection (Raper 2008). The efforts to expand the coverage of social protection become basis for social protection reform in Indonesia.

There are two main reformations on the implementation of social protection in Indonesia. The first reformation is the expansion of social protection coverage covering all Indonesian citizens. In 2004, Indonesian government committed to protect all Indonesian citizens regardless their economic status. This intention is stipulated into the Law no 40/2004, called the National Social Protection Law (Sistem Jaminan Sosial Nasional– SJSN). This regulation employs universal approach covering all Indonesian citizens including formal and informal sector workers, the unemployed and the poor. According to that Law, social protection includes pensions and savings for the elderly, national health insurance, work

injury insurance and death benefits for survivors of deceased workers (Widjaya & Simanjuntak 2010, p. 159). However, the regulation was not implemented for 10 years since the policy was issued in 2004. The implementation of the regulation started on January 2014 after guidelines and other regulations for implementation of the Law have been issued.

The second is administrative reformation. The law no 24/2011 on social security implementing agency (Badan penyelenggara Jaminan Sosial-BPJS) become legal basis on using single implementing agency for social security in Indonesia known as Badan penyelenggara Jaminan Sosial (BPJS). Previously, there were 3 government implementing agency (ASKES, ASABRI, Jamsostek) for social security program. This reformation is beneficial to improve the quality of services as the system is more integrated.

Some scholars maintain that implementation of social protection covering all citizens seems to be very utopian. Widjaya and Simanjuntak (2010, p. 160) for instance wonder how Indonesian government finance the social protection covering all citizens. Tambunan and Purwoko (2002) also questioned the financial sustainability of social protection in Indonesia. It has been maintained that financing universal social protection scheme is expensive whereas Indonesia spend relatively small amount of social protection expenditure (Suharto, 2007). Scmitt and Chadwick (2014) maintain that Indonesia spend much lower old age pension compare to Thailand and Vietnam that spend between 37 and 49 per cent of total social protection public expenditure on income security for older persons.

However, this paper argues that the legislation is not utopian as it shows the good political will from Indonesian government to implement social protection as a tool in poverty reduction and prevent vulnerabilities. This regulation can force the government to spend more expenditure in social protection. This commitment can be seen in the increasing expenditure on social protection time to time. OECD reported that a rapid increase over the years in Indonesian government expenditure on education. In 2000, Indonesian government spend 2.5% of GDP to finance education which has slight increase to 3.5% of GDP in 2007. The coverage of health protection to poor people and near-poor households is also increased time to time. Recently, health protection program (jamkesmas) for people in poverty and vulnerable covers more than 70 million people allocated between 40 and 70 per cent of total public social protection expenditure (OECD 2010; Widjaya & Simanjuntak 2010).

The major progress also made in the design of social protection. Indonesian government reform social protection approach from emergency and crisis mitigation

approach to towards an extension of the coverage of unconditional and conditional income support for people in poverty and vulnerable households. This initiative also integrated with complementary initiatives aimed to empower vulnerable individuals such as government-sponsored micro-credit programmes. Moreover, actors outside government from international organizations and local non-government organization actively participate and contribute to provide social protection program. A good example of this is social welfare insurance scheme (ASKESOS) has targeted poor workers in the informal sector and Dana Sehat program supported by an NGO or self-help association. It was estimated that there were 4,000 villages in 18 provinces implement these schemes (Tmbunan & Purwoko 2002, p. 25).

Those initiatives has significantly reduce the number of poverty from 24,20% during the monetary crisis in 1997-1998 to nearly 15.5% in 2008 and 11,47% in 2013 (BPS 2013). This achievement need to be improved as there are some gaps in the implementation of social protection including lack of coordination and synergies among the existing programmes, coverage, financial sustainability, cost of administration, targeting issues, compliance and policy driven as noted by many scholars such as Purwoko, Widjaya, Simanjuntak and Kabeer. Kabeer (2010) for instance found in his research that state support for social protection is frequently driven by political considerations such as the need to win elections and to build political legitimacy.

Conclusion

Social protection as an approach of poverty reduction has been developed from crisis mitigation strategy to an extension of the coverage of unconditional and conditional income support for people in poverty and vulnerable households. Social protection plays significant contributions to resolving the problem of poverty and vulnerability in developing countries since social protection contribute to economic growth, the fulfilment of human rights, increase human development, create social and political stability, prevent the slide into poverty and eliminate discrimination and marginalization. The experience of Indonesia in implementing social protection program shows considerable progress in improving the social conditions of its citizens particularly the people in poverty and vulnerable groups. The number of poverty continue to decline from 24,20% during the monetary crisis in 1997-1998 to 11,47% in 2013. However, there is considerable room for improvement as there are some gaps in the implementation of social protection programs including lack of coordination and

synergies among the existing programmes, coverage, financial sustainability, cost of administration, targeting issues, compliance and policy driven. Ignoring these gaps might lead to program ineffectiveness and poor outcomes.

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