

Challenges in The Implementation of Cash Social Assistance (BST) Programs in Indonesia

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Abstract. The execution of social assistance programs, notably the Cash Social Assistance (BST) initiative in Indonesia, grapples with a myriad of intricate challenges. This literature review diligently explores the multifaceted issues hindering the smooth implementation of BST across diverse regions. A crucial concern arises from the need for more reliable data validity, impeding the program's effectiveness in identifying and aiding its target beneficiaries. Additionally, an uneven distribution of aid has surfaced, deepening disparities in societal support. The study systematically examines stumbling blocks in socialization efforts, revealing gaps that hinder comprehensive outreach, particularly to marginalized population segments. With the overarching goal of elucidating the complex challenges within the BST implementation landscape, this research provides valuable insights accessible to policymakers, practitioners, and academics striving to enhance the efficacy of social assistance programs. Furthermore, the research significantly contributes to refining policy and implementation strategies, addressing crucial issues for the benefit of the targeted communities in Indonesia.

Keywords: Cash social assistance (BST), Implementation challenges, Social assistance programs, Indonesia.

1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed the global economy, including in Indonesia. Its impact has been felt through increased unemployment and decreased income due to activity restrictions aimed at reducing COVID-19 exposure. The Indonesian government has responded by taking steps to mitigate the financial effects of this pandemic, including reallocating funding for social assistance programs, including the cash social assistance program.

Bansos, or social assistance, is a government initiative to address economic inequality. Bansos has received substantial public attention since it symbolizes a program with competing interests that must be balanced in order to aid local governments in achiev

governments in achieving social well-being. According to the Republic of Indonesia's Ministry of Home Affairs Regulation number 32 of 2011 [1], "Bansos is the provision of assistance in the form of money/goods from local governments to individuals, families, groups, and/or communities that is not continuous and selective in nature, with the aim of protecting against the possibility of social risks."

In addressing social welfare issues, the Indonesian government has implemented specific programs to tackle social problems resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. By allocating social assistance funds for the National Economic Recovery (PEN) program totaling 101 trillion rupiah in 2021, the PEN program for 2021 was realized through five initiatives: Family Hope Program (PKH), Rice Card/ Regular BPNT (Non-Cash Food Assistance), Rice Card/BPNT for PPKM (Community Activity Restriction Enforcement) or Regional Proposed Social Assistance, Cash Social Assistance (BST), and Extreme Poverty Rice Assistance.

Despite its important role in the Indonesian government's COVID-19 response efforts, the BST program faces many implementation challenges that have yet to be comprehensively explained in previous research. These challenges include problems such as inaccurate targeting of beneficiaries, lack of transparency in program operations, duplication of beneficiary data [2], uneven program outreach efforts [3], and the inability of the program to achieve the expected goals. Intended purpose [4]. Therefore, this article provides a comprehensive explanation aimed at providing an indepth understanding of the various challenges that have arisen during the implementation of the BST program in Indonesia. BST in Indonesia faces a number of obstacles that must be overcome. Thorough data validation ensures accurate aid targeting, and transparency demands open data exchange and independent audits. Integrated management systems and inter-agency data sharing prevent duplication. Boosting program efficacy involves community involvement, technology-driven outreach, and regular evaluations. Success is influenced by policy evaluations, inclusion considerations, research collaborations, and feedback systems, benefiting vulnerable communities in Indonesia affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The concept of targeting errors in implementation means that the criteria set to identify and register eligible beneficiaries are only partially met in practice[5]. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify the targeting accuracy of the BST program. Regarding program socialization, as stated by Herdiana [6], socialization is an effort to disseminate the content or substance of a policy that has been created with the intent of promoting knowledge and understanding among various stakeholders, including the target group, so that they are willing and capable of fulfilling their roles in achieving the objectives as outlined in the policy. In this context, program socialization is a communication and outreach process used by the government to introduce and educate the public about a program or policy to be implemented.

Furthermore, concerning the program's objectives, as noted by Putra [7], policy objectives are what a program/policy aims to achieve, both tangible and intangible, based on the primary interests within the system that determine the attainment of policy objectives. In this case, the objective of social assistance is to provide help to those in need so that they can sustain their livelihoods and be protected from potential social risks arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Regarding program monitoring, according to Rossi et al. [8], program monitoring is the systematic and ongoing documentation of key aspects of program performance, evaluating whether the program is running as desired or in accordance with standards. In this context, BST program monitoring observes the progress of program implementation and identifies and anticipates issues, allowing for early action to be taken.

Therefore, this paper aims to analyze and explain the social assistance program, particularly BST, by examining the phenomena surrounding the program using variables, namely, Program Targeting Accuracy, Program Socialization, Program Objectives, and Program Monitoring [9]. This study is essential for providing a holistic analysis and understanding of the ongoing phenomena and the inhibiting factors affecting the effectiveness of the BST program in Indonesia.

2 Research Methods

This study utilizes a literature review approach, analyzing various sources such as scholarly journals, research reports, and policy documents related to the BST Program in Indonesia. Employing a descriptive method, the research aims to understand the challenges in the comprehensive implementation of social assistance programs. The initial step involves searching and identifying literature on the implementation of cash social assistance programs in Indonesia, with inclusion criteria focusing on publications within the last five years (2018-2023). Selected literature samples are contextually analyzed, emphasizing variations in the BST program implementation across Indonesia. Data extracted from findings and recommendations and a review of methodologies contribute to a literature synthesis. This synthesis compares and contrasts the implementation of cash social assistance programs, identifying aspects for further investigation.

3 Result and Discussion

3.1 Cash Social Assistance

Social assistance involves government-provided monetary transfers, goods, or services to aid people experiencing poverty or less privileged, safeguarding them from social risks and enhancing economic and population welfare [10]. In addressing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, a policy called the BST program was introduced. Silalahi [11] explains that BST recipients are those who are not part of the Family Hope Program (PKH) and are deemed eligible to receive such assistance. BST recipients are individuals who have been directly economically impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and are registered in a database containing identity information such as name, address, National Identification Number (NIK), and an active telephone number.

The Ministry of Social Affairs of Indonesia provides this assistance, primarily targeting recipients identified through the Integrated Social Welfare Data (DTKS). Data prioritization for BST eligibility is based on proposals from local government authorities at the district and city levels. Proposals must include a letter of absolute responsibility for the proposed families' data accuracy. This process is outlined in Minister of Social Affairs Decree No. 54/HUK/2020 concerning the Implementation of Cash Social Assistance in Addressing the Impact of COVID-19. The regulation emphasizes addressing poverty comprehensively, even if not all impoverished individuals receive assistance. BST aims to alleviate the livelihood burdens of those who lost jobs or were furloughed due to pandemic-related workplace inactivity.

Program Targeting Accuracy. Program targeting accuracy assesses how well the BST program aligns with the predefined targets. The primary target group for the BST program is commonly referred to as beneficiary families. Distributing BST to the public is more complex than government regulations imply. Indonesia for Global Justice examined social assistance distribution in Nusa Tenggara Timur and Nusa Tenggara Barat in 2020, uncovering numerous cases of duplicate beneficiaries. This resulted in unfair and unequal BST distribution. The extended distribution process further exacerbated the issue, causing delays compared to other cities in Indonesia.

In several cases identified in West Bekasi, there are still individuals who, despite being financially capable, continue to receive BST. Their names were not recommended to receive BST in the first place. Similar findings have also been described by Dani and Megawati [12], indicating that there are individuals who are not financially disadvantaged but still receive BST. One example is individuals who own extensive fields or farmland, yet their names are listed as BST beneficiaries. This situation arises because the BST recipient data is derived from the 2018 Integrated Social Welfare Data (DTKS), which means their names are included in the DTKS database. However, the DTKS data is supposed to be updated every six months in June and December, and yet the 2018 DTKS data is used as the basis for distribution.

Another issue occurs when potential aid recipients are initially disqualified due to their financial stability. However, there were instances where the Ministry of Social Affairs opened an opportunity for prospective BST recipients through their official website, where individuals were only required to input their ID card (KTP) and family card (KK) data without any further screening [13]. These are some of the factors that contribute to the misallocation of BST.

The high number of BST recipients who do not meet the established criteria, such as individuals who have moved but are still registered as BST beneficiaries or even deceased individuals still appearing as recipients [10], is a result of outdated data. Data is inherently dynamic and should continuously reflect the on-ground situation. In line with this, according to Afni et al. [14], the BST program still needs to be more effective because there are eligible individuals who do not benefit from the program, and there is overlapping data [15], [16]. Therefore, data renewal is necessary to ensure that the BST program is accurately targeted.

The need for well-integrated data between local and central governments has led to suboptimal distribution of BST to the public. As stated by the former Minister of Social Affairs, Khofifah Indar Parawansa [17], the social assistance data currently used by the

central government is not up-to-date. The last verification of DTKS was conducted in 2015, rendering the data outdated and irrelevant. This lack of synchronization has led to several village heads in the Sukabumi region, West Java Provincial Government, refusing to distribute BST. They refuse to do so because of the invalidity of BST recipient data and the overlapping data with individuals already registered as recipients of the Family Hope Program (PKH) [18]. The impact of invalid social assistance data can be highly detrimental. Eligible beneficiaries who should receive assistance might be overlooked or denied the necessary access. On the other hand, individuals who should not qualify may receive assistance, leading to inefficient allocation of social assistance funds and misuse of state budgets.

In contrast to the previous situation, Venezia et al. [19] explain that the BST provided to the public meets the criteria for BST recipients. These families received COVID-19 basic food assistance in 2020, and their data has been combined and updated by the Department of Population and Civil Registration. Following the existing regulations, these recipients fall within the category of poor and vulnerable individuals with daily incomes who were economically affected during the COVID-19 pandemic. The effectiveness of BST is attributed to data cleansing and recipient data matching, ensuring that the criteria are met and providing up-to-date beneficiary information [20], [3]. This indicates that when the data used as a reference for providing social assistance is updated, the distribution of social assistance will be more accurate and aligned with the criteria for beneficiaries.

Program Socialization. As an initial stage in the implementation of the BST program, it is crucial to conduct socialization activities. In this phase, the community is provided with information about the BST program that is being carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though information about the BST program has been disseminated through mass media, socialization is still essential to ensure that those in need of the program are aware of it and can register as potential BST recipients.

Regarding program socialization, it has yet to reach the entire population. As a result, many individuals still need to be made aware of the existence of the BST program, especially those who need it [10]. In other cases, as explained by Melati et al. [16], there needs to be more socialization regarding the BST program, both from social services and local authorities. Instead, they only provide invitations two or three days before the distribution of BST funds. Without adequate socialization, the community lacks understanding of the program, and some may not even be aware of the BST program.

There are various reasons why government socialization efforts may not be optimal, one of which is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has made it impossible to hold gatherings for BST program socialization. For example, socialization efforts in Takalar Regency by the local government and the local Social Services Department did not involve direct engagement due to concerns about overcrowding during the pandemic [20]. As a result, the public could only acquire information through television, which differs from previous methods. Siregar et al. [3] explain that individuals received information about the BST program through WhatsApp groups established by the local government. This suggests that the socialization of the BST program still needs to be more effective in reaching those who require it.

Program Objectives. The goal of the program is the alignment of the program's outcomes with the objectives set beforehand. The objective of the BST program is to assist the economic well-being of individuals affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The community perceives the BST program as significantly helpful in alleviating their daily life burdens and having a noticeable impact on meeting their basic family needs. However, the effect may be insignificant [10]. However, people often feel that the provided amounts need to be increased. Initially, the assistance amount was 600,000 rupiahs for the first three months, which was later reduced to 300,000 rupiahs in subsequent months [13], [16]. Given the circumstances, this nominal amount is perceived as not very significant, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic when daily expenses have increased and people's incomes have drastically decreased.

The objective of the BST program has been achieved. In essence, BST is not intended to enrich the population but to help improve people's purchasing power for daily needs. While it may not fully restore the economy, at the very least, the goal of the BST program in assisting individuals affected by COVID-19 has been met [15], [20], [3]. When the program's objectives are attained, it represents a positive outcome as intended. However, ongoing monitoring is crucial to identify future improvement areas.

Program Monitoring. Program monitoring is measured by observing the oversight conducted throughout the BST program's duration. It involves monitoring the program's progress and identifying and anticipating emerging issues for follow-up action. Looking at the aspect of BST program monitoring, the relevant authorities have been conducting oversight to the best of their ability, with no instances of corruption or unauthorized fees. If issues arise, the public has been encouraged to report them to the appropriate authorities [13], [15], [20], [10], [3]. This is a positive step to ensure transparency, accountability, and compliance with established regulations.

However, there is an interesting aspect of the BST program monitoring described by Khothimah et al. [10]. where despite monitoring and efforts made by the Social Services Department to address recipients who do not meet the criteria, the reality in the field still shows many recipients who are not accurately targeted. This is due to intimidation by these individuals and is often based on a sense of embarrassment or reluctance to revoke their beneficiary status.

Program Targeting Accuracy	Program Socialization	Program Objectives	Program Monitoring
Many duplicate beneficiaries	Only some households have been informed about the BST program.	The amount of assistance provided needed to be more.	Intimidation toward monitoring stakeholders by ineligible beneficiaries often stems from a reluctance to revoke their beneficiary status.

Table 1. Summary of the Challenge in The Implementation BST Program by

Individuals who are Lacking not financially socialization disadvantaged but concerning the BST still receive BST program Using the old database (2018 DTKS data is used as the basis for distribution) People who relocate vet stay with their BST registration status. Those who have passed away are still included in the recipient list.

The main issue that often arises with government-provided BST programs is the problem of inaccurate targeting. This is primarily due to the fact that the data used as a reference for assisting needs to be regularly updated at both the local and central government levels. According to research conducted by Saiful Mujani Research & Consulting (SMRC) [21], 49% of respondents believe that social assistance still needs to be accurately targeted, with only 37% of respondents feeling that government social assistance has reached its intended beneficiaries. The distribution of social assistance still needs to be more accurate because 60% of respondents claim that some individuals have yet to receive aid despite being eligible, and 29% of respondents believe that the assistance is directed at the wrong recipients. Additionally, 4% of respondents feel that the assistance amount needs to be more significant. This data indicates that government-provided social assistance in handling COVID-19 in Indonesia has not been functioning optimally.

A thorough plan is required to address the critical problems in the BST program's implementation properly. First and foremost, a robust data validation and updating method is necessary to provide correct beneficiary information, which improves target determination. This targeting precision can be enhanced further by employing technology for data management. A well-designed public awareness campaign should also be used to bridge the information dissemination gap, supplemented by community participation and local partnerships to improve program understanding. Regular monitoring and evaluation processes should be implemented to track program performance and react to changing needs. These strategic initiatives, which include data accuracy, precision targeting, information dissemination, community involvement, and technology utilization, contribute to a more successful and inclusive BST program that is better prepared to address the difficulties posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This study adopts a comprehensive approach, focusing on issues across various regions of Indonesia, in contrast to previous research that analyzed cash social

assistance programs regionally. Recognizing its limitations, the study acknowledges potential biases from the limited information available in the literature. Variability in literature quality poses another consideration, with differing reliability across sources. As literature captures knowledge at specific points, the study may only partially reflect recent changes. Notably, the absence of direct field data collection introduces limitations in empirical validation. Acknowledging these constraints provides a transparent framework for interpreting findings across studies.

Suggestions for future research include enhancing validity through diverse information sources, such as community surveys and direct interviews, and utilizing current government data. Comprehensive assessments of source credibility using efficient evaluation techniques are recommended. Real-time data and recurring updates can improve real-time issue monitoring. Combining approaches involving field data collection and stakeholder input enhances research breadth. Collaboration with relevant stakeholders, such as NGOs and local governments, improves dataset quality and validity. Field-based methodologies in additional studies offer comprehensive insights into regional contexts and community needs, contributing to a deeper understanding of issues related to cash social assistance programs in Indonesia.

4 Conclusion

The Cash Social Assistance program is crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic, yet its implementation faces significant challenges, mainly due to mistrust in data accuracy. Issues include inaccurate data, improper beneficiary targeting, unequal aid distribution, and poor communication. To address these challenges, routine data audits, improved transparency, and community involvement are essential. Supporting targeted outreach programs with local organizations is crucial. Redesigning aid distribution processes, implementing real-time monitoring, and investing in frontline worker training are necessary. Long-term policy reform, public awareness campaigns, and post-pandemic preparation planning are vital measures. Collectively, these strategies can effectively overcome current problems, ensuring the Cash Social Assistance program consistently supports the community during crises.

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