

Reinventing Public Administration: Local Poverty Coping Policy Viewed from Javanese Cultural Perspective

Rutiana Dwi Wahyunengseh^a, Sri Hastjarjo^b, and Marlupi Julianingrum^c

Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia^{a,b},
Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Daerah, Jawa Tengah Province^c

^arutianadwi@staff.uns.ac.id

Abstract. This article aims to explain the contribution of Javanese cultural perspective as supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of poverty coping policy, as a part of public administration reinventing strategy. The performance of poverty coping policy is one of public administration affairs. This idea builds on an assumption that the development of recent studies on public administration is inseparable from the focus of public service performance measurement and governance orientation. Therefore, this study assumes that its performance success and failure indicate “how appropriate is the policy model implemented? How does the explanation of the interrelationship between local environment variable contribute to the model appropriateness?”. This study was a qualitative research conducted in one medium city in Central Java Province, Indonesia using case study method. The informants of research were Local Apparatus Organization, Local Poverty Coping Coordination Team, and society. The preference of informant about the implementation of poverty coping policy was explored using open-ended interview, document study, and observation. Interpretive inquiry was used to identify the contribution of Javanese cultural values that are incentive and disincentive in nature to the achievement of poverty alleviation goal. Categorical data and analysis on the interrelationship between information groups were analyzed and visualized in the model using NVIVO program. Theory used was ethical theory of public administration to explore the meaning of words, attitude, and behavior of local government and poverty policy recipients. The research found that local cultural values can be eroded by procedural and formality aspects of the measurement of poverty policy performance indicator. There is a shift of poor status’s meaning among the society. Consequently, poverty coping program potentially perpetuates the poverty status itself. The theoretical contribution of this article was that it presented autocratic analysis of poverty coping policy model deriving from national government. The result of analysis was used to propose a poverty coping policy implementation based on local Javanese culture. The practical contribution of this article was that it provided the revitalization of poverty coping policy based on local Javanese cultural values.

Keywords: Local Public Administration; Poverty policy–based on local cultural value; Post-modern theory; Theory of public administration; NVIVO analysis

Introduction

Poverty, generally described as a condition of powerlessness and limited access to resource, is never outdated to be the topic of development. The difference lies on the effect of poverty coping policy responded to by a community in its time. The same policy applied to different communities and different times will results in different effect. Therefore, local wisdom content is required in coping with poverty.

Poverty problem is a global threat. Alleviating any form of poverties is the first goal of Sustainable Development Goals. In 2030, the target is to build the resilience of the poor in facing vulnerable situation and to reduce their vulnerability to extreme events such as climate and economic, social, and environmental shocks and disasters. It is in these matters that a community's perspective will color the "way of surviving" in vulnerability.

Poverty dimension, viewed from sustainable development perspective, focuses on strengthening the dignity of all community members across ages and genders. The application of appropriate national protection system to all presupposes environmental factor. Considering this premise, this article will evaluate the implementation of national social protection grant applied in one of Indonesian cities, viewed from Javanese cultural perspective.

In Indonesia, Statistics Center (*Badan Pusat Statistik*, thereafter called BPS) records that the number of poor people, those with monthly per capita expenditure under Poverty Line is 27.77 millions people (10.64 percents of total Indonesian populations) on March 2017. Poverty coping policy can also be seen explicitly from National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) of 2015-2019. Poverty rate is attempted to be decreased continuously until reaching about 7.0-8.0 percents and open unemployment rate until reaching 4.0-5.0 percents in the end of 2019.

The case of "new poor citizens" occurs any time in Indonesia, so that the database run today and updated every 3 years nationally, of course, cannot capture new poor citizens when re-registration has not been done. National Government, in this case National Team for Poverty Coping (*Tim Nasional Penanggulangan Kemiskinan*, thereafter called TNP2K) develops Independent Updating Mechanism (MPM) of Integrated Poor and Destitute Management Program Data. The role of local government is needed to register new poor citizens and the changing poverty indicator of poor citizens registered in order to find out the change of poverty level. In this case, poverty comodification potentially occurs, meaning that data of poor people is used to be a means of benefiting certain groups, including government element, civil society activist, or members of society. It makes the poverty alleviation an eternal phenomenon ever existing all the time thereby becoming a material of political campaign during local leader election period. Such condition occurs because the poverty alleviation tends to be dominated by policy building on individual's poverty value. Individual poverty theory explains that individual competency is the weakness due to physical limitation, limited competency, and limited access reasons. It makes social grant less helpful in alleviating poverty when the poverty alleviating strategy requires reward and punishment compelling the growth of individual's willingness and ability of being productive (Maskovsky, 2001; Levitan, Mangum, Mangum, Sum, 2003;

Campbell & Wright, 2005; Ravallion, 2016, Ulriksen & Plagerson, 2016).

Why does poverty remain to exist? Metadata resulting from a study on poverty in Indonesia shows that the challenges faced in the management of poverty coping program are: (1) not target-appropriate because of less accurate data; (2) not program-appropriate; (3) inappropriate grant distribution, and (4) inappropriate-grant quality. How is the response of the poor to poverty coping? The answer to these questions is based on the premise that will be proved through this article, ethical values rubbed down by poverty policy capitalization.

Poverty theory explains that poverty management is dependent on theory used, in which every theory is not value-free. This research tends to focus on relative poverty. The concept of relative poverty is viewed from “inequality” or “gap” point of view, the presence of an individual’s (a group’s) prosperity position compared with other individuals (groups) within the same community. Poverty culture perspective explains that poor group will bequeath a culture called poor culture, characterized with opportunistic and non-productive culture (Sanberg, 2015; Kessey, 2013; Sugrue, 1994; Goetz, 2003; Goering, Jeins, & Richardson, 2003). Poverty theory also explains that *Poverty Is Caused by Cumulative and Cyclical Interdependencies*. This theory explains that individual situation and society resource are interdependent with a loose, interconnected, circling, and interdependent economy in a cumulative causal process. This theory suggests that an individual becomes less advantaged in their social context, and then affects psychological ability at individual level. Such the condition can be exacerbated by structural and political factors rendering them more marginalized.

Poverty coping policy is not independent of governance ethic problem. It is because the poverty coping policy results from the policy makers’ choice based on certain values. The implementation of poverty coping policy is interpreted as to impose a mechanism of certain values on a community or a group considered as poor to bring it out of poverty identity. Thus, contestation will occur between government and poor community to meet “poverty management” condition. It is in this condition that ethic theory can be the lens to see whether or not the local poverty coping policy is in harmony with Javanese cultural ethics.

Ethical theory explains the difference between expected behavior and actual behavior (Wraith, 1970). This theory explains as well that an individual or a group of individuals’ action or behavior is determined by what is considered as valuable to them. The source of ethics is varying. In this poverty coping policy, ethical source is based on legal ethics and utilitarianism. Referring to legal ethical theory, normative reference about good and bad is the standard normative rule governing the case. Meanwhile, utilitarianism ethical theory builds on “what an individual should do” considered as ethical when it maximizes the advantage for many people affected by his/her deed. In this research, action choice of poverty program beneficiaries is analyzed using Javanese belief values.

Javanese people’s perspective about self esteem in Javanese culture is related to societal social values. Therefore, to keep creating harmonious condition, Javanese people attempt to be viewed as good ones by others (in Soehada, 2014). The norm of Javanese culture is identified based on cultural idioms as the manifestation of cultural values supported by society. Javanese

religious system is symbolized in the idiom *manunggaling kawula Gusti: manungsa sadrema nglakoni, sumendhe ing pepesthening pangeran, pasrah lan sumarah ing pangeran, wis ginaris ing pangeran*, a belief in the origin of life and the end of life toward their God's eternity. For that reason, Javanese people should fill in their life with working along their life. Idioms *ana dina ana upa* means "when there is a day, there will be surely blessing for life"; *aja sangga uang* means "Don't be lazy"; *sing sopo gelem obah bakal mamah* means everyone willing to work (make endeavor) will surely be able to get food. In the term of expenditure, there is an idiom *kegedhen empyak kurang cagak*, meaning a warning that an individual should have plan or desire corresponding to his/her ability (Koentjaraningrat, 1982; Santoso, 2010). Javanese people should not deceive and seize others' right for themselves, recalling that everything is given by God and will be accountable for to God. The belief "*manungsa sadrema nglakoni, sumendhe ing pepesthening pangeran, pasrah lan sumarah ing pangeran, wis ginaris ing pangeran* related to *sing sopo gelem obah bakal mamah*" will result in a community attempting to meet its need not by using shortcut (any bad way) to pursue wealth (greed).

Methodology

This study revealed the poverty beneficiaries' point of view in an area dominated by community with Javanese ethnic background. The element compared was the informants' attitude to: (1) status as "poor citizen"; (ii) type of grant; and (iii) mechanism or process of getting grant. Attitude is divided into (i) agree, (ii) agree partially, and (iii) disagree categories. Informants are classified by sex, age, education and family dependent. Data collection was conducted through focus group discussion, and followed with in-depth interview with key informants. The informants were selected randomly from each of criterion groups (gender, age, education, and family dependent). The result of informants' opinion is classified using ethical theory framework.

The research was conducted in one of cities in Central Java, Indonesia. This city's poverty line is the highest one in Central Java province in 2017. Meanwhile, Local Poverty Coping Coordination Team (*Tim Koordinasi Penanggulangan Kemiskinan Daerah*, thereafter called TKPKD) has established a synergy between government and citizen activist forum attempting to conduct a variety of programs to cope with local poverty since 2011.

The informants of research included 38 persons from government group (G), 25 from active citizen (AC), and 56 from society (S). The group of cases becoming the object of research includes (i) society's role in determining the beneficiary of poverty grant, (ii) predisposition of society's attitude to the form of local poverty grant, and (iii) characteristics of relation between poverty beneficiaries and government. Data validation in this research was conducted using research informant triangulation, by means of asking the same subject of questions to different informants, and data collection method triangulation, in which a topic is explored using three methods: in-depth interview, field observation, and document analysis. The preposition developed is that poverty grant erodes local culture and results in commodification of poverty

status.

Result and discussion

From the result of ethical theory analysis, it can be found that the poverty alleviating program in the form of temporary unconditional cash transfer or subsidy has resulted in the shift of standard values as “good” or “less good” measure. The shift of ethical values found in this research includes: (1) values of honesty versus manipulating data for personal benefit; (2) values of effort/working independence versus dependence on giving (grant); (3) values of self-sufficing versus greed. The finding above explains the foundation of conclusion drawing as mentioned earlier.

Poor status and dependence on giving formerly considered as something embarrassing change into something profitable economically. As a result, some falsification is made over the data of poor people. Viewed from legal aspect, data falsification is something unjustifiable or called unethical. Viewed from Javanese culture, behavior of “admitting as poor people to get help” is the one deviating from “*nrimo ing pandum*” tenet. Data of Social Service explains that there is about 20% of grant beneficiaries listed not qualifying the indicator of poverty in home validation. Data triangulation conducted on surrounding people (B and AC) explains that during poor group registration, there are some individual groups considering it as an opportunity of benefiting themselves. As a result, the non-poor (the have) people having access to registering officer will benefit from such the opportunity.

The society’s choice of poverty status suggests that most people do not object with poor identity as long as the status provides benefits during grant distribution from government in the form of education grant, food grant, health grant and similar. Poor status no longer has social value, but it has economic value. Poor status is no longer embarrassing and wants to be removed, but otherwise it is maintained and commercialized.

The shift of working independence ethical value to dependence one can be seen in the following story. There is no preference among the informants; all of them love grant in the form of cash or product, compared with job training facilitation. If combined with Javanese cultural value “everyone working will get outcome”, this informant’s preference has shifted. Receiving cash grant strengthens the value of dependency on giving. From interview with poverty grant beneficiary (G) and FGD with active citizen (AC), it can be found a data showing that 40% of informants get access to the grant because they are acquainted with political party cadres; 40% of informant are acquainted with government apparatus; 20% of informants obtain the grant through Neighborhood (*Rukun Tetangga*) meeting, and information from fellow citizens.

This phenomenon is actually in line with Javanese value order “kinship and helping each other (communality and concord [*guyub rukun*])”. However, viewed from utilitarianism ethics, it becomes inappropriate, because the kinship relation used to give its group more access will marginalize other actually more deserved groups.

Poverty is inseparable from a conception of interdependency culture and wish to be catered to. The implication is that poverty coping program should touch cultural domain and a view of

having shy feeling to be dependent on giving. The explanation of an informant unwilling to be published reveals the predisposition of deviating behavior resulting from the excess of poverty coping program. Firstly, it is a character of willing to pretend to be the poor people in order to utilize the government policy. Nevertheless, his/her neighbors do not report the fraud immediately, as long as he/she does not harm their interest. It can be seen from the following case story.

“The admission of poor students in favorite state schools is harmful to the non-poor and high-performing children. Owing Poverty Recommendation (*Surat Keterangan Miskin*, thereafter called SKTM) only, the students with low grade (score) can be admitted in the school. Meanwhile, they are actually not poor, but the village head (*pak lurah*) felt *pekewuh* (reluctant) when there are some of his citizens ask for SKTM but he did not give it. However, finally this case was detected when a neighbor whose child’s ranking is replaced reported this to the school...”.

As a conclusion, from the society side, poverty is considered as commodity as well. It is a commodity exchanged for political support with the holder of political power, particularly those having connection to political actor. Social accountability concept emphasizing on the role of active citizen to strengthen public accountability assumes that society group acts on and is partial to the society group it represents, thereby can prevent the stealing of public resource for elite group. The fact shows that society group also tends to behave opportunistically and to act unaccountably.

The relationship of kinship value as social capital, in the context of poverty grant, potentially creates moral hazard and opportunistic behavior constituting normative deviation. Moral hazard is a problem occurring when the agent does not perform what has been agreed with the principal (normative). Opportunistic behavior is to utilize resource and access owned for personal or self interest. Citizen representative can also be an agent when he/she represents other citizen groups. Public consultation on local poverty grant program in the research location indicates this opportunistic behavior phenomenon. In the society, there is a pride of being an element involved in government power circle. In the context of local culture, government is the ruler group, so that being close to the government means increases prestige and access to benefit. On the other hand, the pride of being the part of domination, the representatives of active citizen reluctantly voice an opinion different from the government agenda. Dialog process does not occur to answer the rationality behind decision making. Citizen forum is directed to an attempt of building consensus between government agenda and active citizen’s representatives in a co-opted forum nuance.

The development of policy of reimbursing transport cost for poor citizen meeting becomes a phenomenon made as a source of living. It results in the commercialization of the opportunity of participating in “citizen participation” forums. The closer the individual to the government officers, the more is the opportunity “of participating” and the more the “livelihood” the individual gets by attending some forums. This phenomenon fades the spirit of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) between citizens. This phenomenon potentially results in position

commercialization. The habit of providing “attendance or meeting cost (money)” usually developing in bureaucratic world and political representatives has penetrated into society culture.

The poverty coping program in the form of cash grant has different strategic value in the society. Female group prefers food grant with any variation, for example Non-Cash Food Grant in the form of shopping voucher in staple material store. Meanwhile, the male group prefers poverty grant in health and education areas. Javanese value still seems to dominate the society’s preference in the term of poverty grant. Female group prefers “kitchen affairs”, while the male one prefers “out-of-kitchen affairs”.

The group of younger informants (less than 40 years) looks for access to poverty grant more aggressively. Meanwhile, the older one does so more passively, dependent on registration. In age category, there is difference of activeness in looking for access to poverty grant. The younger women collect a variety of poverty grant cards are actively than the older women do.

Viewed from the size of family dependent, there is a difference of activeness in looking for poverty grant. The group with larger dependent is more active. It is in line with Javanese value, the larger the need, the larger is the effort of fulfilling it. However, viewed from utilitarian ethical aspect, the attempt taken through nepotism channel potentially harms the basic value of kinship, mutual cooperation, and tolerance cultures, as it cultivates egoism and clienteles.

Considering those phenomena, there should be a change in the strategy of coping poverty policy. In other words, public administration reinventing should be done to strengthen the positive support of local culture. On the contrary, public administration practice through policies eroding local culture becomes a transactional culture harmful to the cohesion value of group.

Standing on the Javanese cultural value, the revitalization of local poverty coping policy should be directed to “*obah mamah*” culture, that is, strengthening work productivity. The policy of designating the group of grant beneficiaries should be based on the cultural value perspective held “*Gusti ora Sare*”. It means to uphold honesty and accountability as God sees everything and everything should be accountable for. The integration of local culture value to reduce the excess of public policy deviation becomes something strategic.

Conclusions and future study

This research finds some prepositions. Firstly, public administration practice in the term of poverty coping policy is affected by individual, social environment, cultural value orders and local political policy. Intervention of policy in the same area location will get different reaction in different groups.

Secondly, poverty grant gives incentive to strengthen poverty when it is not compensated with the mechanism of accountability demand to the beneficiaries. In the group having predisposition to take any way (shortcut) and having less independency, poverty grant will strengthen the culture of being dependent on government’s giving.

Thirdly, in certain group loving and wanting more grants in the form of cash money, there is a tendency that the group close to political actors will get more access to the poverty coping

program grant. It potentially reduces the active participation value of society into the commercialization of government grant.

Fourthly, the implementation of poverty coping policy integrates local cultural values as the tagline of policy. The process of poverty policy implement should also be designed in such a way that promotes the local cultural values strengthening a communal caring bond as a big family. Thus, the risk of looking for opportunity by marginalizing other groups can be minimized.

Practical recommendation given to the implementation of poverty coping policy is as follows. Firstly, data of poverty should be discussed in the smallest neighborhood from which the data is organized, by promoting again the cultural values of kinship, such as “*guyub rukun paseduluran*” (catering to each other as a family). Secondly, indicator of poverty and precondition of targeted group feasibility should be published to the lowest society unit level through various media. Thirdly, community-based monitoring system should be functioned actively to report any deviation and bias occurring in the term of poverty alleviation intervention. Local belief values should be promoted at all stages, reminiscent of the substance of accountability, for example “*Gusti ora Sara tansah eling lan waspodo* (God is not sleeping, always remembering and alerted)”

Recommendation for further studies is based on a preposition that cultural factor affects the sustainability and the usefulness of public policy implementation. Therefore, this research recommends a study on the effect of poverty coping program receiving in the group more familiar with local cultural values compare with the one less familiar with it.

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