

Opportunities and Challenges in Implementing Adaptive Social Protection Policies for Indigenous Peoples in Indonesia

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Summary

In response to the multifaceted challenges faced by the community, particularly those arising from disaster and climate change impacts, the government has strategically prioritised social protection through initiatives such as Adaptive Social Protection (ASP). The ASP concept is central to this effort, aiming to build resilience against environmental risks proactively. In the context of indigenous communities, ASP holds great potential in enhancing social protection by aligning with their adaptive strategies. However, challenges like data management issues, limited access to remote areas, and cultural considerations persist. Overcoming these challenges is crucial for effectively implementing ASP, ensuring meaningful protection for indigenous peoples in the dynamic landscape of social and environmental risks.

Keywords: Adaptive Social Protection, indigenous communities, opportunity, challenges

Introduction

The presence of various challenges and risks throughout the life cycle can lead to changes in the standard of living for individuals and families. Hence, a comprehensive social protection system is essential to prevent, alleviate, and address lifelong risks and challenges arising from shocks and social vulnerabilities faced by citizens. Moreover, as one of the countries in the Asia-Pacific region facing substantial disaster potential and looming threats from climate change, Indonesia finds itself at the forefront of addressing these formidable challenges (Christmas et al., 2021). In a proactive response to these issues, the Indonesian government has strategically prioritised social protection on its agenda. This commitment is notably reflected in the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) for 2020-2024 and in the latest National Long-Term Development Plan (RPJPN) for 2025-2045 (Bappenas, 2020). The government is dedicated to striving for a comprehensive society.

Indigenous communities, a vulnerable societal group, are particularly impacted by political, economic, and organisational conditions (Boillat & Berkes, 2013).

Their direct dependence on the environment makes them susceptible to disasters and climate change, especially as many reside near conservation areas. Despite contributing minimally to greenhouse gas emissions, indigenous communities are the first to experience the direct impacts of climate change (United Nations, 2008). According to data from the Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN, 2022), as of August 2022, Indonesia is home to 2,161 indigenous communities, emphasising the need for protection in regular conditions and during disasters. The government has initiated programs like the Program for Empowering Remote Indigenous Communities (PKAT) and the Integrated Village Transformation Program (TEKAD) to empower local communities (UNDP, 2022). These programs align with Adaptive Social Protection (ASP) principles, aiming to enhance the adaptive capacity of households and communities (Scognamillo, 2024). However, the unique characteristics of indigenous communities require a tailored approach to ASP implementation (United Nations). This op-ed will explore the opportunities and challenges associated with implementing ASP for indigenous peoples in Indonesia, acknowledging the need for a nuanced and customised strategy to realise effective social protection.

ASP Concept

The formal introduction of ASP came in 2008 with Davies et al.'s work. They define and differentiate it from "shock-responsive social protection," highlighting its long-term focus on empowering people to navigate future shocks, not just react to immediate ones. This concept arose from the convergence of climate change adaptation (CCA), disaster risk reduction (DRR), and social protection (SP). ASP takes a proactive approach, leveraging safety nets to build resilience against climate and environmental risks. It transcends reactive coping mechanisms by prioritising livelihood transformation, understanding structural vulnerabilities, promoting equity and justice, utilising science-based evidence, and adopting a dynamic long-term perspective for continuous program adaptation in the face of evolving shocks and stresses. This approach rests on four building blocks: programs, data and information, finance, and institutional arrangements and partnerships (Bowen et al., 2020).

To date, various countries have also made efforts to implement this concept. One country that applies the ASP concept is the Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Program (SASPP), which began in 2014. SASPP has been a pioneer in the sector, successfully implementing ASP programs in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. These programs focus on drought and flood preparedness, early warning systems, and building household resilience through cash transfers, livelihood-enhancing initiatives, and disaster risk financing mechanisms. These programs provide access to general social protection for poor and vulnerable people in the Sahel and adaptive and responsive social protection to existing shocks (World Bank, 2023). In addition, various countries have also made efforts to integrate adaptive elements into their social protection policies.

In Indonesia, the government has committed to implementing social protection in the 2020-2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN).

It is currently planning to transform social protection with ASP as its foundation. This will be incorporated into the 2025-2045 National Long-Term Development Plan (RPJPN) and the 2025-2029 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN). The goal is to create social protection that covers risk protection for individuals, families, or on a massive scale and can function optimally in normal conditions and adapt to emergencies. This will help prevent and reduce poverty and vulnerability by strengthening the resilience of individuals, households, and communities to social and economic risks caused by natural disasters and climate change. This will be achieved through pentahelix collaboration between the central government, local governments, communities, NGOs, academics, and businesses.

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Indigenous communities, being vulnerable, face challenges in both disasters and everyday conditions due to their strong connection to nature (Race et al., 2023). Their reliance on natural resources amplifies their susceptibility, exacerbated by limited access to resources and services. Therefore, they need adaptive social protection systems tailored to their specific circumstances (United Nations, 2021). Indigenous communities are particularly vulnerable to climate change, residing in conservation areas and adapting uniquely to environmental impacts (Rusly et al., 2020).

Adaptation efforts, such as the Orang Suku Laut's seasonal migration, showcase indigenous communities' resilience, indicating that 80.18% of them have experienced the changes brought about by climate change (Ariando, 2019). Similarly, during certain seasons, indigenous communities in Papua leave their villages to live in the forest, constructing temporary shelters to work and meet their needs (FWI, 2019).

These examples highlight that indigenous communities have unique ways of thinking in their adaptive efforts, considering ancestral culture and the balance of nature as sources of life. In this context, the concept of ASP can enhance the capacity and adaptations already made by indigenous communities. This is especially true when there is a mismatch in indigenous communities' understanding of the occurring disasters. Therefore, it is crucial to align ASP policies with the specific needs of these communities.

Moreover, the government has initiated protection efforts for indigenous communities through policies like Minister of Home Affairs Regulation (Permendagri) No. 52 of 2014, addressing empowerment, preservation, and protection (Kemendagri, 2014). Various governmental and non-governmental organisations, including AMAN, WALHI, and HuMa Indonesia (WALHI, 2023), show commitment to indigenous community protection. These organisations raise awareness, promote dialogue, and support advocacy, offering the potential for effective collaboration in realising the Adaptive Social Protection (ASP) concept for indigenous communities.

Despite these opportunities, various issues persist—social protection programs, such as Program Peduli in 2016 (Prasetyo et al., 2021). The initial assessment for 8,329 indigenous communities indicates that only 22.63% have a National Identity Card (KTP), and 62.21% find obtaining KTP challenging. AMAN (2023) reports that around 1.5 million individuals in these communities lack an electronic ID card (e-KTP), often used as a basis for public service data. This highlights a **data management problem that can lead to additional issues in providing social protection for indigenous communities.**

Limited access to communication and information media in remote areas, coupled with some communities reluctance to embrace technology, adds to the challenges (Hidayat, 2019)

Improved road access to indigenous settlements is necessary, hindered by sandy or muddy roads, impacting transportation. This complicates the census and logistics distribution for indigenous communities. Additionally, according to the Special Staff of the Secretary General of the Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN, 2016), better communication access is crucial, influenced by distance, state policies, and some communities' resistance to modernity, like the Baduy in Lebak Regency, Banten, especially the Inner Baduy, requesting the removal of internet connectivity in mid-2023 (Prabowo et al., 2023). Moreover, it unfolded in the government's efforts to protect Nduga refugees during the armed conflict in Nduga Regency, Papua, between the Indonesian National Army (Tentara Nasional Indonesia/TNI) and pro-independence groups (OPM) since December 2018. Originating as a reaction to the Indonesian government's policies since 1963, the OPM advocates for self-determination in the region (Rahman et al., 2023). This conflict forced thousands of residents to seek refuge until July 2019 (Prionggo et al., 2019). Although food aid was distributed through the Ministry of Social Affairs, it faced rejection due to cultural incompatibility. The limited accessibility and connectivity pose a unique challenge in designing social protection program implementations, this also poses a challenge in the social protection strategy for indigenous communities that needs to be addressed explicitly by respecting the customs and culture of each community.

The opportunities and challenges outlined above emphasise the importance of an adaptive and nuanced approach in formulating Adaptive Social Protection (ASP) policies to address specific obstacles faced by indigenous communities in Indonesia effectively. Localised data management solutions, infrastructure investments in remote areas, and community-driven decision-making processes are vital.

Respecting indigenous customs and involving communities in policy-making ensures trust and meaningful impacts. A comprehensive ASP strategy must proactively adapt to diverse cultural and geographical contexts, promoting inclusivity and effectiveness in achieving social protection for indigenous peoples.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the implementation of the Adaptive Social Protection (ASP) concept represents a commendable effort to safeguard Indonesia's vulnerable indigenous communities, addressing their unique challenges in routine circumstances and times of disaster. Despite the potential benefits, the process comes with inherent opportunities and challenges. ASP aligns well with the adaptive strategies of indigenous communities and existing government policies, offering a robust framework for collaboration with non-governmental organizations. However, challenges such as data management issues, limited access to remote areas, and cultural considerations pose significant hurdles. To effectively strengthen the resilience of indigenous peoples, there is a need for nuanced adjustments, including localized risk assessments, community-driven approaches, improved access to remote areas, and targeted capacity-building programs that respect cultural norms. These recommendations are essential for ASP to fulfill its role in enhancing social protection for Indonesia's indigenous peoples against socio-economic and environmental risks.

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