

Anthropology and Social Policy: Exploring Social Dynamics in Community Development

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze the impact of social policies on social dynamics and cultural change in Indonesia, with a focus on the education, health, economic empowerment, and social welfare sectors. The method used in this research is a qualitative approach, with secondary data analysis through case studies of social policies implemented between 2014 and 2024. The results show that social policies that support education and women's empowerment have a significant impact on social mobility, gender equality, and political awareness. On the other hand, the social welfare and economic empowerment sectors show a moderate impact on local cultural change. The implications of this research emphasize the importance of policies based on community participation to reduce social inequality and create more inclusive and sustainable cultural change. The findings also provide insights for improving social policies that are more responsive to social dynamics and local cultural values.

Keywords: anthropology, social policy, social dynamics, community development.

Introduction

Anthropology plays an important role in understanding social dynamics in community development, as the discipline studies humans in the context of social, cultural and community structures (Stull, 2019). One of anthropology's greatest contributions is its ability to provide insights into how cultural values, norms and practices influence the way communities respond to social change brought about by development policies (Grillo & Stirrat, 2020; Lewis, 2017). In many cases, social policies that are implemented without taking into account the cultural and social aspects of society fail to achieve their goals or even worsen existing social inequalities (Wilkinson et al., 2017). Therefore, an anthropological approach is important to identify and analyze the social interactions that shape the structure of society and influence the success or failure of social policies.

The importance of anthropology's role in community development lies in its ability to dig deeper into how social solidarity, local values, and ways of adapting to changes in society play a role in determining the effectiveness of social policies (Kline & Moretti, 2014; Wilkinson et al., 2017). This understanding is crucial in designing policies that are more sensitive to the needs and



realities of the community. In addition, anthropology also facilitates an understanding of existing social challenges, such as resistance to change, differences in perspectives between social groups, and the impact of development on community welfare (Birkland, 2019). In this case, social policies that do not consider these social realities often do not work well and can even worsen existing social inequalities.

In addition, social policy has a major influence on social and cultural changes in society. These policies aim to create positive change, but the impact is not always in line with expectations. In some cases, social policies actually worsen social inequality or cannot accommodate the growing social dynamics (Healey, 2020; Ingram et al., 2019; Jovchelovitch, 2019). Social assistance programs that do not consider social structures and local wisdom can lead to economic dependence on aid and reduce community independence. Similarly, housing policies that are not adapted to local culture can lead to a loss of cultural identity and trigger social conflict. Therefore, social policies need to be designed by considering the social and cultural dimensions of the community so that they can be accepted and implemented properly.

In community development, understanding the patterns of social interaction and cultural values prevailing in society is crucial to designing appropriate social policies. Anthropology allows policymakers to analyze how social policies are received, responded to, and adapted by society (Head & Alford, 2015; Seering et al., 2019). Anthropological studies have shown that social policies made without considering the existing social and cultural structures in society often encounter obstacles in their implementation. Therefore, an approach based on the social and cultural realities that exist in society is very important so that policies can be implemented more effectively and sustainably. In many cases, the failure of social policies can often be attributed to ignorance of the social and cultural factors that influence people's acceptance of these policies.

Anthropology also plays a role in evaluating the effectiveness of social policies in achieving inclusive development goals. By understanding the social dynamics that occur in society, governments and policy institutions can tailor development programs to the more tangible needs of the community. In health policy, an understanding of the community's belief system in traditional medicine is very useful for designing health programs that are acceptable and effective for the community (Fabinyi et al., 2014; Willow & Wylie, 2014). Similarly, in education policy, an understanding of the community's existing informal education system can help design a curriculum that is more relevant to their needs and life experiences. Thus, an anthropological approach becomes very relevant in ensuring that the social policies implemented are truly able to answer the challenges and needs of the community holistically.

The main problem identified in this research is whether the currently implemented social policies are able to accommodate the existing social dynamics or actually exacerbate the existing social inequality. Given the increasingly complex development of society, social policies must be able to respond to increasingly diverse social and cultural challenges. Some social policies that are poorly targeted or do not consider complex social factors often contribute to increasing social inequality and unequal access to resources and public services. Therefore, it is important



to explore how anthropological approaches can be used to improve social policies in the context of community development.

As such, this research will explore the relationship between social policy and community culture, as well as the social factors such as social stratification, social networks and cultural practices that influence the success of social policy in community development. The main focus of this research is to explore how social policies can be adapted to existing social and cultural dynamics to be more effective and sustainable in improving community welfare.

Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with the main focus on using secondary data to analyze social dynamics, cultural changes, and the impact of social policies in society. The data used comes from various relevant sources, both from the government, research institutions, and scientific articles, so that researchers can analyze the social policies implemented and their influence on social structures and cultural changes that occur.

This research utilizes various secondary data sources that are relevant and publicly accessible, with the aim of gaining an in-depth understanding of social policies and their impact on social dynamics and cultural changes in society (C et al., 2015; Hammarberg et al., 2016). Some of the main sources that will be used in this research include social policy documents, research reports, social statistical data, and scientific articles and publications. Social policy documents, such as government reports, local regulations, laws, and other policy documents, provide a clear picture of the policies that have been implemented at the national and local levels, as well as their impact on society. In addition, research reports and related studies published by government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and academic institutions will be used to identify the impact of social policies and social changes that occur in society.

Researchers collect relevant social statistical data, such as social inequality, economic development, poverty levels, migration, and other patterns of social change, which can be obtained from government agencies such as the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) and relevant research institutions. In addition, journal articles and books that discuss topics related to social dynamics, social policy, and social anthropology will be used to gain a broader perspective on the influence of social policy on society, thus making a significant contribution to the analysis of this study. All data used with a time period series of 2014 to 2024.

The data analysis stage is carried out with software, NVivo 12 Plus to process and analyze the data that has been collected. The researcher used coding comparison in NVivo 12 plus to compare the themes that emerged in various data sources (Hilal & Alabri, 2013; Mortelmans, 2019). This research aims to provide in-depth insights into the influence of social policies on social and cultural change in society and how these policies can be improved to produce more inclusive and sustainable development.



Analysis of the Impact of Social Policies on the Social Structure of Society

Based on the analysis of social policy documents, research reports, and statistical data, it is found that social policies implemented in Indonesia, especially the education subsidy policy, have a significant impact on changes in the social structure of society. One of the main findings is the direct effect of the education subsidy policy introduced by the Indonesian government, which has improved access to education for children from poor families. This policy has increased children's participation in school, especially at the primary and secondary levels. By reducing financial barriers, this policy allows children who were previously hampered by economic limitations to obtain a better education, which in turn improves their social mobility (Fitri, 2025). The impact of this education policy has opened new doors for these children, giving them the tools to compete in a more competitive job market and ultimately improving their socioeconomic status (Wandi et al., 2021).

In addition, the increased social mobility observed in many cases suggests that children from poor families who can now access education have a greater chance of achieving higher social positions. With increased access to education and better skills, these individuals are now more competitive in the job market (Giatman et al., 2020). This increased educational attainment allows them to get better jobs and thus improve their economic status and reduce existing social inequalities. Education, in this case, acts as a key driver of social change, offering a path out of poverty for many families and communities.

It also contributes to increased social and political awareness among communities. Along with increasing levels of education comes a growing political awareness and a deeper understanding of social rights and obligations. More educated citizens now better understand their right to access public services and the importance of their participation in the political process. Research data shows an increase in participation in elections and political discussions, with more people involved in policy discussions, governance and decision-making at the local level. This shift reflects broader engagement in the democratic process and suggests that improved education can lead to a more politically active and informed society.

Table 1. Distribution of Social Policy in Indonesia

Social Policy	Main Objective	Data Source	Impact on Social Structure
Education Subsidy	Increase access to education for children from poor families	Report on Indonesia Smart Program (PIP), Ministry of Education and Culture, BPS	Increase participation of children from poor families in education, reduce social inequality, and improve social mobility
Cash Direct Assistance (BLT- <i>Bantuan</i>)	Provide aid to communities affected by the	Ministry of Social Affairs Report, BLT Program	Temporarily increase the economic welfare of poor families, but has not



<i>Langsung Tunai)</i>	COVID-19 pandemic		addressed long-term economic inequality
Family Hope Program (PKH-Program Keluarga Harapan)	Provide aid to poor families to access basic social services	PKH Program Report, Ministry of Social Affairs, PKH Evaluation	Help reduce poverty and improve the welfare of poor families, reduce dependence on assistance
Indonesia Health Card (KIS-Kartu Indonesia Sehat)	Provide free health services to the public	BPJS Health Report, Ministry of Health, BPS	Provide more equitable access to healthcare, improve public health status, especially in remote areas
Pre-Employment Card	Provide training and incentives to job seekers	Pre-Employment Card Report, Program Management Agency, Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs	Improve job skills and reduce unemployment, particularly among youth and job seekers
Non-Cash Food Assistance (BPNT-Program Bantuan Pangan Non Tunai)	Improve food access for poor families	BPNT Report, Ministry of Social Affairs, BPS	Improve food availability and reduce hunger, but still needs to be complemented by long-term economic empowerment policies

(Source: adopted from relevant government annual reports, 2025)

Based on the analysis, several significant patterns of social change emerged as a result of the social policies implemented in Indonesia. One of the main changes identified is the shift in social class relations. Social policies, especially those related to education, have provided greater opportunities for children from poor families to access better education, which was previously difficult to achieve due to economic limitations. With more access to education, children from lower societal groups now have the opportunity to improve their social status. This has a direct impact on vertical mobility, where individuals who were previously locked in the lower social class can now move towards the middle class. This transformation is not just an improvement in living standards, but also a major step towards reducing the social inequality that has prevented the majority of society from developing.



Figure 1 shows key concepts that play an important role in social change and social policy. Words such as “social,” “inclusion,” “education,” “rights,” and “justice” dominate, indicating that these topics are strongly related to creating social justice, equal access, and people's participation in social and political processes. These concepts highlight the importance of policies that not only respond to economic needs, but also create more equitable opportunities for all levels of society.

Some of the concepts that appear in this word cloud are very relevant to the topic of discussion, including Social Justice, which shows how important it is to create policies that support social justice and reduce existing inequalities in society. Education and Rights also emphasizes the important role of education in reducing poverty and improving access to basic rights for the poor and marginalized. The concept of Poverty and Inclusion illustrates how the right social policies can reduce poverty and promote social inclusion for all, creating space for those who were previously marginalized. In addition, Policy and Development shows that social policies that are inclusive and oriented towards sustainable development are needed to encourage positive changes in people's lives.

Through these findings, it can be concluded that social policies in Indonesia, especially those focusing on education and community empowerment, have had a very positive impact in changing the social structure of society. More inclusive and equitable policies have had a direct impact on social mobility, gender equality and political awareness, which is growing. These impacts indicate that deep social policies can improve the quality of life for individuals from low economic backgrounds, giving them greater opportunities to thrive.

However, while much progress has been made, challenges remain, such as persistent access gaps in remote areas and the importance of improving the quality of education to focus more on skills relevant to labor market needs. For this reason, it is important for the government and relevant agencies to continue to improve the implementation of these social policies, ensuring that equal opportunities are accessible to all citizens without exception, and that no group is left behind in the development process.

Community Response to Social Policy

Community participation in social policies plays an important role in determining the success of these policies (Prasetio et al., 2021; Suyatna et al., 2024). Based on the findings, it can be seen that communities involved in the planning and implementation of social policies tend to show higher levels of satisfaction. This suggests that a participatory approach to policy formulation is critical to creating more responsive and inclusive policies. When people are given the opportunity to participate in decision-making, they feel more valued and have control over the changes that occur. Conversely, policies that are implemented without considering community input or aspirations are often met with resistance and dissatisfaction. Therefore, it is important for policymakers to continue to encourage social participation in policy formulation to reduce inequality between the government and society. This approach can create mutual trust and better collaboration, which in turn increases the effectiveness of the policies implemented.



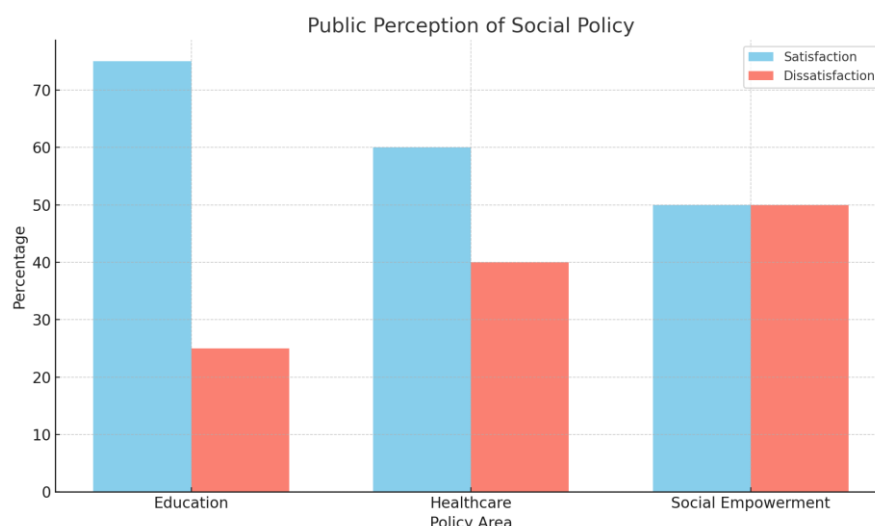


Figure 2. Public Perception of Social Policy
Source: (Data Processed by Authors, 2025)

Figure 2 shows the level of public satisfaction and dissatisfaction with social policies in three main areas: education, health, and social empowerment. In the education sector, more than 70% of people are satisfied with the policies implemented, such as education subsidies and scholarship programs, which provide greater access for children from poor families to better education. Despite the high level of satisfaction, around 20% of people are still dissatisfied, most likely due to the gap in education quality between urban and rural areas and the lack of adequate support to ensure equitable access. Meanwhile, in the health sector, around 60% of people are satisfied with policies such as the Healthy Indonesia Card (KIS) that provides access to health services to the poor. The program is considered successful in reducing inequalities in access to healthcare, especially in remote areas. However, around 40% of people still express dissatisfaction, which may be related to service distribution issues and varying service quality in some areas. In the social empowerment sector, around 55% of people are satisfied with the policies implemented, such as the Family Hope Program (PKH) which provides social assistance and skills training to poor families. However, 45% of people are dissatisfied, which may be due to the gap between planned and implemented policies, as well as the uneven distribution of assistance in different regions. Overall, although social policies in Indonesia show relatively high levels of satisfaction, there are still challenges that need to be addressed, especially in terms of social empowerment and a more equitable distribution of policies across Indonesia. Improving access and quality of services as well as a participatory approach to policy planning will go a long way in improving public satisfaction and reducing dissatisfaction with existing social policies.



Social Dynamics and Cultural Change as an Impact of Social Policy

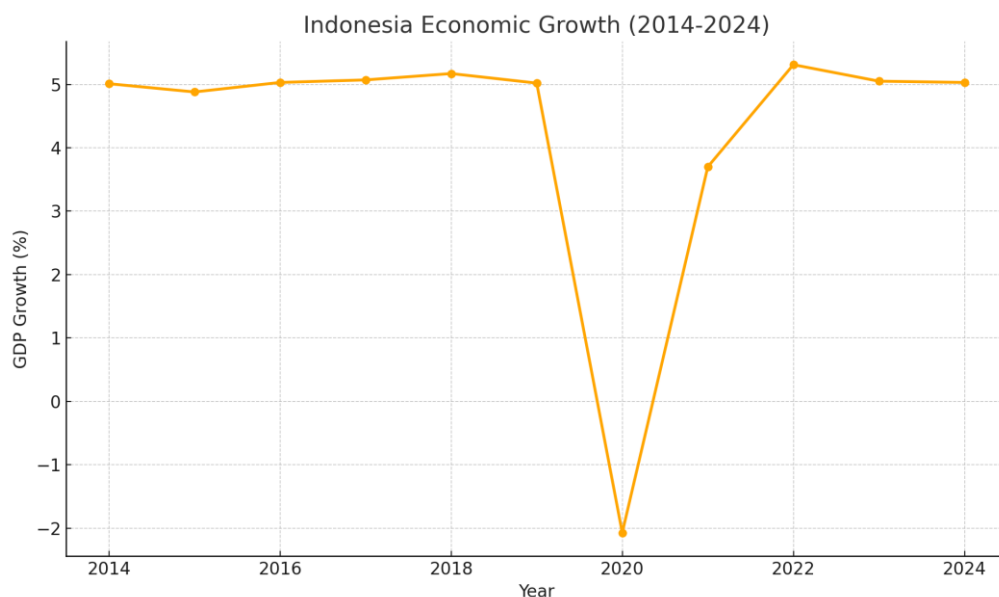


Figure 3. Indonesia Economic Growth (2014-2024)
Source: (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025)

Figure 3 shows Indonesia Economic Growth (2014-2024), showing significant fluctuations in Indonesia's economic growth, with a sharp decline in 2020, which is in line with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the global economy. Before the pandemic, Indonesia showed stable economic growth averaging more than 5% between 2014 and 2019. However, in 2020, Indonesia's economic growth experienced a very sharp decline, reaching negative numbers, reflecting the huge impact of social restrictions and reduced economic activity due to the pandemic. After 2020, there was a significant economic recovery in 2021 and 2022, with growth again reaching more than 5%, indicating that the economic recovery has been rapid. Projections for 2023 and 2024 show stabilization and a return to positive economic growth.

Along with the economic recovery reflected in figure 3, socioeconomic changes in Indonesia have also undergone significant transformation. The social policies implemented, especially those related to improving access to education and health, contribute to a more equitable distribution of the economy. With more people able to access basic services, such as education and health, there has been a significant change in the welfare level of the community, especially among those who were previously marginalized. Social programs designed to improve people's welfare, such as education subsidies and the Healthy Indonesia Card (*KIS-Kartu Indonesia Sehat*), are helping to reduce existing social inequalities.

In addition, women's empowerment policies also play an important role in cultural transformation. Programs that target women's empowerment, such as the Family Hope Program (*PKH-Program Harapan Keluarga*) and skills training programs, contribute to changes in social norms that previously restricted women's roles. This transformation can be seen in women's



increased participation in the workforce and public life, which was previously very limited. Women's empowerment not only provides them with greater access to education and employment, but also has an effect on their social position in the family and society. Although Indonesia experienced a sharp economic downturn in 2020 due to the pandemic, the rapid economic recovery followed by social transformation shows that inclusive and empowerment-based social policies have brought positive impacts that not only improve economic conditions, but also lead to more equitable cultural and social changes.

In addition, the social changes found in this study, such as changes in gender roles and increased political awareness, can be analyzed more deeply through the theory of culture and socialization. This theory emphasizes how individuals and community groups learn and adjust to the prevailing social norms in their culture. Social policies that focus on women's empowerment and gender equality, have driven changes in social structures by altering norms that previously restricted women's roles in the family and society (Baldwin & Twigg, 2024). Prior to these policies, women were often faced with strict restrictions in terms of access to education, employment and participation in public activities. However, with policies that support women's empowerment, there has been a significant shift in the way society views women's roles. They began to be seen not only as housewives, but also as individuals who make important contributions in various sectors, such as economic, political and social. As such, this change not only altered the position of women, but also created space for more inclusive and progressive social norms in society.

This research also explores cultural transformation through a structural anthropology perspective, which views culture as something that can change over time, influenced by various external factors, including social policies. In this context, public policies focusing on women's empowerment, more equitable access to education and political awareness have driven changes in existing cultural norms. Structural anthropology theory emphasizes that culture is not static, but dynamic and can evolve with social change. These cultural transformations are often triggered by policies that change social structures and influence the way people think and act. For example, policies that introduce more inclusive education for women in various regions, both urban and rural, not only improve their access to the workforce, but also affect society's perception of women as agents of social change.

From an anthropological perspective, this cultural transformation leads not only to changes in individual behavior, but also to broader social structures, including relations between social, ethnic and gender groups (Chatterji & Mehta, 2020; Schlehe & Yulianto, 2020). Changes in gender roles, such as those occurring in Indonesian society, can be seen as part of a process of cultural negotiation, where long-entrenched social norms are replaced with new values that are more egalitarian and open. This leads to the formation of a more inclusive collective identity, where women, indigenous people and other marginalized groups have a more significant place on the social map.

Social programs designed to improve people's welfare, such as education subsidies and the Healthy Indonesia Card (KIS), are helping to reduce existing social inequalities. In addition, women's empowerment policies also play an important role in cultural transformation. Programs



that target women's empowerment, such as the Family Hope Program (PKH) and skills training programs, contribute to changes in social norms that previously restricted women's roles. This transformation can be seen in women's increased participation in the workforce and public life, which was previously very limited.

The Relationship Between Social Policy and Local Culture

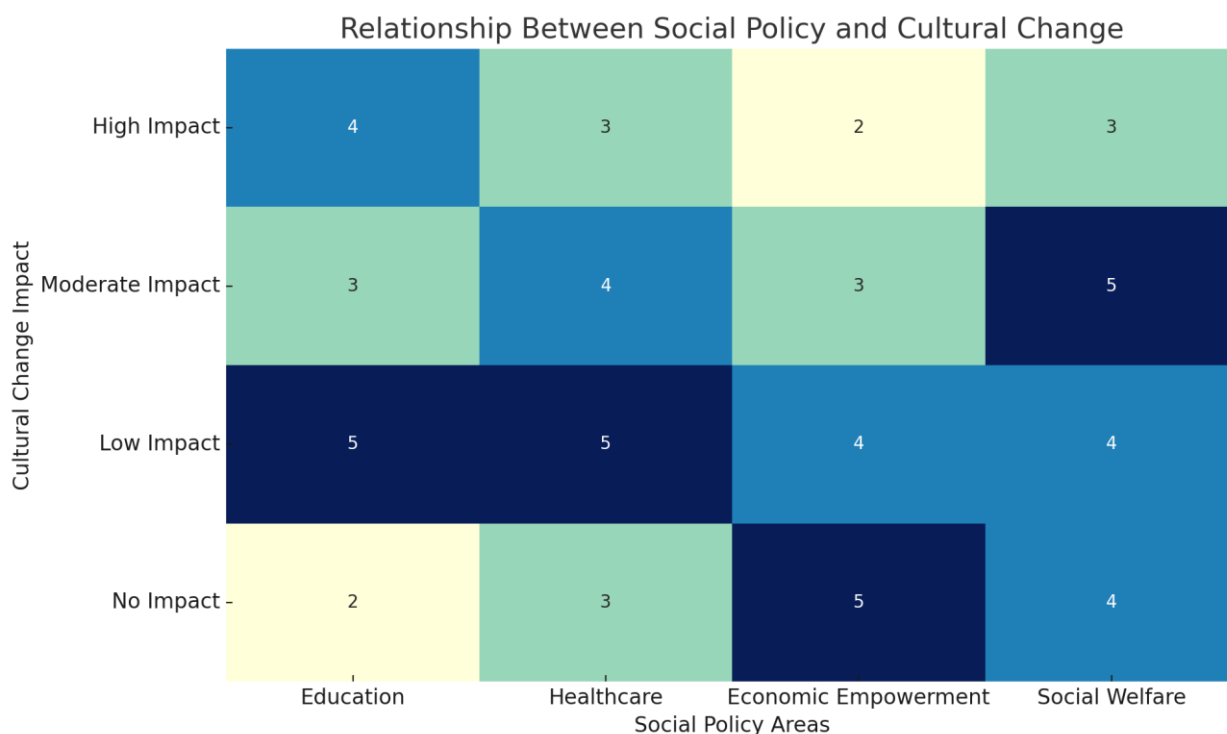


Figure 4. Relationship Between Social Policy and Cultural Change
Source: (Data Processed by Authors, 2025)

Based on Figure 4, the relationship between social policies implemented in Indonesia and their impact on local cultural change can be analyzed using cultural relativism theory and cultural hybridization theory. Cultural relativism theory emphasizes the importance of understanding social policy in the context of local values. Policies that do not take into account local norms often fail or even lead to social conflict. In this case, the graph shows that social policies in the education and health sectors have a moderate to high impact on local cultural change. Greater access to education and health services is proven to drive social change in line with local values, such as increased health awareness and more equitable education rights. In contrast, social policies in the Social Welfare sector have a low impact, which may reflect the gap between implemented policies and more rigid local cultural norms.

On the other hand, cultural hybridization theory illustrates how social policies that involve communities in their planning can create synchronization between policies and local culture, resulting in social change that is more easily accepted. This is seen in the Economic Empowerment and Health sectors, which show a moderate impact on local cultural



change. Therefore, it is important to continuously review and improve social policies with an approach based on a deep understanding of the social and cultural dynamics of society.

Policies that involve the community in the policy formulation process tend to have a high impact on cultural change. The Education and Social Empowerment sectors show the greatest potential in driving more progressive cultural transformation, by providing opportunities for communities to develop in line with global developments, while still maintaining relevant local values. Thus, social policies that are sensitive to local values and involve community participation can result in social change that is more effective and accepted by the community.

Conclusion

This research reveals that social policies implemented in Indonesia, especially in the education, health, women's empowerment and economic empowerment sectors, have had a significant impact on social and cultural changes in society. Inclusive policies, which provide space for active community participation, have successfully encouraged social mobility and improved gender equality and political awareness. In the education sector, education subsidy policies and scholarship programs for poor families have opened wider access for children from low economic backgrounds to access higher education, which in turn has improved their social status. The health sector has also experienced positive changes with increased access to health services through programs such as the Healthy Indonesia Card (KIS), which provides greater access for the poor, especially in remote areas.

However, despite these positive impacts, there are still some challenges to be faced in the implementation of social policies. One of them is the gap in the distribution of social services, where the implemented social policies have not been fully equitable, especially in remote areas that still experience difficulties in accessing basic services. In addition, economic empowerment programs, although providing greater opportunities for welfare improvement, still face obstacles in terms of long-term effectiveness in reducing dependence on social assistance.

In terms of cultural change, social policies that take into account local values and accommodate community needs have proven more effective in promoting positive cultural transformation. Cultural hybridization is an interesting process in this study, where policies that are able to synchronize policies with local norms tend to produce social changes that are more accepted and sustainable by the community. Conversely, policies that do not take into account local cultural norms have the potential to cause social conflict or dissatisfaction among communities who feel that the policy is contrary to their values.

Therefore, the main conclusion of this research is that a participatory approach to social policy formulation is necessary to create policies that not only meet economic needs but are also in line with local social and cultural values. To ensure the sustainability and long-term impact of social policies, it is important for the government and relevant agencies to continuously adapt policies to the local context and involve the community in every stage of policy planning and implementation. Improving the quality of social policy implementation, which is more equitable



and responsive to social change, will contribute to the creation of a more inclusive, equitable and sustainable society.

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