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## Key points

- Social protection in Indonesia, including the Raskin programme, has overlooked the gendered nature of economic and social risks
- The Raskin programme could reach its objectives more effectively if its gender sensitivity were strengthened
- Specific measures could include promoting women's participation in programme governance structures and addressing vulnerabilities such as malnutrition in pregnant women and young children

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## Gender and social protection in Indonesia: Raskin, the food subsidy programme

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In 1997 Indonesia was one of the countries worst hit by the South-East Asian economic crisis, with poverty levels more than doubling in four years. The economic and social consequences were highly gendered, affecting not only the type of poverty experienced, but also shaping the coping strategies available. Mothers, for example, reduced their food intake to buffer their children against food shortages, resulting in increased maternal wasting and anaemia (Block et al., 2004).

Indonesia implemented social protection schemes as a key policy response to the crisis – schemes that have developed and evolved into longer-term interventions. However, social protection in Indonesia has, to date, paid little attention to the gendered nature of economic and social risks, despite the evidence of the gendered dimensions of poverty and vulnerability.

This Project Briefing synthesises research findings from the first year of a three-year study by the SMERU Research Institute in Indonesia and the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in the UK, funded by AusAID, which aims to address this gap by exploring the linkages between gender, food security and social protection effectiveness. In particular, this study examines the gendered dimensions and impacts of the subsidised food programme, Raskin (*Beras untuk Rumah Tangga Miskin*, Rice for Poor Households), which was first implemented in 1998 as part of the crisis response Special Market Operation (OPK) programme, and now reaches 17.5 million households, approximately 8% of the population.

Research was conducted in four research areas in two districts: Tapanuli Tengah and Kabupaten Timor Tengah Selatan (TTS). The

first is located in the western part of the country, in North Sumatra Province; the second in East Nusa Tenggara (Nusa Tenggara Timur, NTT) Province, one of the poorest regions in eastern Indonesia. The research was conducted using a mixed methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methodology.

A total of 103 households were interviewed with a household questionnaire, eight focus group discussions were conducted with Raskin beneficiaries (four consisting of women, and four of men) and 16 life histories were gathered from men and women at different stages of their lives and social development: adolescence, married, single household heads (divorced, abandoned or widowed), and the elderly.

### Gendered poverty and vulnerability

Poverty rates in Indonesia had been declining steadily in the country since the mid-1970s – a trend that reversed as a result of the 1997 crisis. Poverty rates rose from 11% in 1996 (22.5 million people) to a high of 23.4% (47.9 million people) by 1999. Indonesia experienced a much deeper recession than its regional neighbours and took longer to recover, but poverty rates have started to fall again in recent years, with 15.4% (34.9 million people) living in poverty by 2008.

In this decade, growth has recovered as a result of the stronger domestic demand that has reduced Indonesia's dependence on exports and put it in a stronger position to mitigate the impact of the most recent global financial crisis (Cook, 2009). However, many Indonesians remain extremely vulnerable. Estimates suggest that the number of the 'near poor' in Indonesia – those who will become

poor if a single month's income is lost – is around 115 million people out of a total population of 220 million.

High levels of vulnerability and poverty in the country are strongly influenced by both spatial and socio-cultural characteristics. The east of the country, where many households are subsistence or small-scale agricultural producers, has the highest poverty rate and is the most food insecure. Elsewhere, there is relatively good food availability, although pockets of food insecurity exist.

While many gains have been made in gender equality over recent years – most notably in terms of equal access to education and health services, a reduction in early marriage, growing engagement of women in the labour market, and a small increase of the representation of women in political positions – women continue to face specific gendered economic and social risks.

Labour markets are highly segmented along gender lines, resulting in limited income opportunities for women relative to men, both in terms of the type of work available and gender disparities in wages. In Tapanuli Tengah in North Sumatra, rubber extraction is traditionally male work while rice cultivation is considered as female work. However, the majority of wage opportunities in the village areas are in the rubber plantations rather than paddy fields, resulting in female villagers having to look for jobs as agricultural workers outside the village, for fewer days. In TTS in East Nusa Tenggara, there are more economic opportunities for men, such as construction or carpentry. In contrast, women may sell produce from small market stalls, but such work is limited.

Accepted norms about the gender division of labour have an impact on women's earning potential and on women's access to, and ownership of, productive assets. In TTS, traditional custom maintains that men are responsible for land preparation, with women playing a key role during the harvest. Despite women's significant contribution to agriculture, their labour remains largely invisible, and the persistence of such perspectives is deeply rooted in the local practice of inheritance, which prioritises sons over daughters.

In addition, women spend a significant part of their time managing the household and taking care of children, as well as earning income outside the home. Some women report that this is a constraint to earning an independent income, or getting a better job. Women's labour and income are seen merely as supplements to the incomes of their husbands.

Poverty and food insecurity have particularly strong gender and age dimensions. Nationally, the high rate of stunting, which is a consequence of long-term malnutrition, is a key concern in Indonesia, affecting approximately 46% of children (ADB, 2009). Almost one third (28%) of under-fives are underweight, suffering from moderate or severe malnutrition (data from 2005, UNICEF, 2009). Malnutrition rates among pregnant women in poor

households are also high: iron deficiency anemia (IDA) in Indonesia is prevalent in 40% of pregnant women. It is also responsible for 25% of maternal deaths and associated with low birth weight which has subsequent consequences for children's nutrition as they develop (ADB, 2009).

Women are also at particular risk of greater food insecurity as a result of their lower social status and unequal allocation of resources within the household. Women are more likely to reduce their intake of food when food is scarce. For instance, FAO (2008) report that during the drought and financial crisis of 1997/98, mothers of poor families responded by reducing their own food consumption in order to conserve food for their children, resulting in increased maternal under-nutrition. Household purchases of more nutritious protein-rich foods were reduced in order to afford the main staple (rice), leading to an increased prevalence of anaemia in both mothers and children. The effects were particularly severe for infants conceived and weaned during the crisis, with long-term and intergenerational effects on their growth and development.

## Social protection response to gender vulnerabilities

The introduction of social protection programmes in Indonesia was a key policy response to rising poverty and food insecurity levels as a result of the 1997 crisis and these have since evolved into a broader package of social protection interventions. Their focus has been supporting income security – and to some extent food security and health – through targeted cash transfers, food subsidies and supporting household investment in human capital through education scholarships and subsidies.

Despite the gendered nature of poverty and vulnerability in the country, however, understandings of social risks and gender inequality in particular have not been effectively integrated into social protection policy and programming. There are some recent exceptions, including the education stipend for girls, women's participation in community-led social protection activities, and the recent conditional cash transfer for mothers/pregnant women and adult women in a family, which includes access to prenatal and reproductive health care but, to date, remains relatively small scale.

In general, however, the design of social protection programmes has not been based on an informed assessment of gender inequality, which affects the impact of poverty reduction programmes.

Despite the evidence of the gendered nature of food insecurity, the Raskin programme in particular has no provision to address gender or age-specific food security needs. The programme transfers 15 kg of rice per month per household to poor households (targeting is based on economic classifications on data from the National Family Planning Coordinating Board), covering approximately 17.5 million poor

households across the country, and assumes that rice will be allocated equally within the household. It does not take into account consumption patterns or the different needs of household members.

The government argues that the primary aim of the programme is to help poor households access food, and no further concern has been given to food utilisation among the poor.

## Impacts of Raskin

The Raskin programme suffers from general implementation challenges resulting in irregular and unpredictable transfers to poor households (Hastuti et al., 2008), yet our findings demonstrate that it does make a relatively important contribution to the receiving households. Given that women are mainly responsible for managing the household, including its food security, the overall impacts of the programme can be seen to support women's practical needs.

Research in Tapanuli Tengah and TTS found that the average Raskin contribution to household rice consumption was approximately 35%. This varied between the regions: in Tapanuli Tengah, where rice is the staple food, the average contribution of Raskin was found to be 22%. In TTS, however, the contribution of Raskin rice to household rice consumption is higher, at 48%, because rice is the secondary food – here, corn is the staple (average rice consumption in Tapanuli Tengah is 51kg per month per household whereas in TTS it is 23kg per month).

The biggest benefit for families receiving Raskin is found to be indirect, through the additional support it provides to the household economy by saving money that would have been spent on the full market price of rice. While Raskin rice costs Rp1,600 per kilo (around 18 US cents), the rice at the market costs Rp6,000-Rp6,500 per kilo (around 67-73 US cents). Women allocate this money to buy more nutritious food to be served with the rice, to fund children's school needs and to pay off debts.

As one female participant in a Muara Dua focus group explained: 'If, when Raskin comes, we are behind on our children's school fees, we pay the school fees. School fees cannot go unpaid. Sometimes if it rains we cannot tap [tap the rubber trees], we go into debt. Then after the harvest we pay'. Another, in Tapan, said: 'If there is Raskin we can save money, and the money can be used to buy fish. If there is no Raskin we cannot buy fish, only vegetables.'

The direct benefit of Raskin on the food security of household members was found to have different effects on different household members. The benefits of Raskin are not automatically distributed equally within the household, with existing intra-household dynamics influencing the distribution of the rice. Our research found that in times of food shortages women are slightly more likely to reduce their food consumption in Tapanuli Tengah, but so are men in TTS. These consumption patterns are cor-

related with Raskin as those household members who eat more will also consume more Raskin rice.

While more adult men in TTS stated that they were the ones who reduced their food intake if the family did not have enough food, this can be explained by the availability of various types of food besides rice and maize that are eaten by men, such as sweet potatoes, nuts, and bananas. These foods may not be available to women as they are not always working on the land that produces such foods. This suggests that women also consume less Raskin rice in times of food shortages in TTS.

Within the household, the differential allocation of Raskin, however, is most visible between adults and children. A number of households reported that they give children – both boys and girls – more food. The reasons given are that children are seen as the most important members of the family and less able to cope with hunger.

The distribution among children was more visible in TTS where rice is not the staple food, because families prefer to give rice to young children who are not yet accustomed to eating maize and because rice is considered more nutritious. As one man in Ujung Atas explained: 'Our staple food is maize but the children do not want to eat it, they want rice because they have been eating rice since they were little. So if Raskin rice runs out, we look for money to buy rice to give to the children.' A woman in Sungai Tua said; 'By eating rice the children will be smarter but if we don't have money they are forced to eat maize'.

At the community level, the distribution of Raskin has created tensions among those who receive the rice, and those who do not. In almost all rural villages, therefore, Raskin was divided evenly between all residents, whether poor or rich. According to one village headman, when the Raskin rice was not divided equally, people who did not receive the rice did not want to support mutual assistance (*gotong royong*) activities, leaving that responsibility to those who received Raskin. Interestingly, this is less of a problem in peri-urban areas where the rice is distributed only to beneficiaries listed by the National Statistics Indonesia (*Badan Pusat Statistik*), because of fear that the district government, media, or civil society organisations may monitor and report any deviance from the official rules.

## Political economy challenges

Although there have been unintended positive programme effects on women's food consumption and caring roles, the design and implementation of the Raskin programme has, to date, been gender blind. The programme has a narrow focus on household access to food, which ignores unequal intra-household resource allocation and consumption patterns, often biased against women, and the specific nutritional needs of pregnant women and young children.



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A key challenge is that policy-makers do not consider Raskin to be a gender-related programme. There has been progress at the national level to ensure greater commitment to gender equality through legal frameworks (i.e. the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1984 and the Presidential Instruction No 9/2000 on gender mainstreaming). However, the historical legacy of programmes implemented by the New Order government is that programmes focus on women rather than gender, reinforcing the domestic role of Indonesian women rather than focusing on their empowerment and the need to address unequal power relations at the household and community level.

Furthermore, while Raskin policy stipulates targeting criteria at the local level, implementation procedures are continuously disregarded by the rural village headmen, with local community dynamics often influencing the distribution of the rice. The opportunities to promote gender equality in such a context are limited, politically. The lack of gender awareness in the programme design is further exacerbated by the negligence of women's role in the institutional structure of the programme's implementation. Despite the involvement of various institutions, no gender focal point (e.g. within the local departments in the decentralised structure) has been involved in the delivery process from the national level to the village level. At the community level, where the demand for Raskin distribution is highest, women are excluded from community decision-making processes around the programme's distribution.

## Conclusion and policy implications

The Raskin programme does contribute to household food security, particularly for children, and has important indirect benefits particularly for children's schooling and smoothing seasonal income

deficits. Despite these contributions however, the programme faces a number of challenges, particularly in its implementation, and it is important to recognise its limitations as an effective tool for food security. Evidence clearly demonstrates that women and children face particular food security needs and that women's vulnerability to poverty and food insecurity needs to be addressed. This could be achieved through such measures as securing their employment opportunities, addressing wage disparities to increase low incomes and supporting agricultural production, as well as measures to support progress towards women's empowerment to enhance their status in the household and community. There is, therefore, a need to think strategically about the links between food subsidy programmes and other complementary programmes that may have greater opportunities for further progress on women's empowerment.

Strengthening the gender-sensitivity of the Raskin programme design and implementation could help it reach its objectives more effectively. Measures to achieve this may include:

- Promoting women's participation in the programme governance structures (community meetings)
- Strengthening the focus on existing gendered vulnerabilities in terms of food insecurity and under-nutrition, especially drawing attention to life-cycle vulnerabilities (pregnancy and nursing, young children)
- Supporting linkages and coordination with on-going gender mainstreaming tools especially at the decentralised level such as collecting and analysing sex-disaggregated data and gender budgeting to support gender-sensitive programming.

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### Project Information:

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