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# Refusing to Die: Programmatic Goods in the Fight against COVID-19 in Sampang Regency

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## ABSTRAK

Artikel ini membahas politik distributif bersifat programatik pada masa pandemi COVID-19 pada lingkup desa-desa di Kabupaten Sampang. Pertanyaan yang diangkat adalah bagaimana bentuk pemanfaatan sumber daya berbasis barang-barang programatik (*programmatic goods*) pada masa pandemi COVID-19 di wilayah pedesaan Kabupaten Sampang. Artikel ini memilih metode penelitian kualitatif dan mengambil studi kasus sepuluh desa di Kabupaten Sampang. Asumsi pemilihan lokasi desa berdasarkan kemudahan proses penelitian saat pandemi dan Sampang mempertahankan status wilayah zona hijau paling lama di Jawa Timur. Artikel ini menunjukkan relasi kekuasaan bupati dengan kepala desa bergeser dari cenderung transaksional saat situasi normal menjadi kolaboratif saat menghadapi krisis pandemi. Studi ini juga memverifikasi konsep politik programatik di Sampang dengan fokus tiga syarat berikut, yaitu ketepatan penerima manfaat, keterbukaan informasi, dan komitmen pelaksanaan tanpa diskriminasi. Studi ini menemukan pula bahwa kepala desa berperan sebagai *broker* yang efektif berdasarkan implementasi program-program kesejahteraan desa yang dikaitkan dengan penanganan pandemi, seperti posko relawan desa lawan COVID-19, masker gratis bagi warga desa, penyaluran BLT- Dana Desa (BLT-DD) untuk warga desa miskin dan terdampak pandemic, pembagian paket sembako, akses internet gratis di setiap desa  
Kata kunci: Politik distributif, barang-barang programatik, pandemi, COVID-19.

## ABSTRACT

This article discusses programmatic distributive politics in the villages in Sampang Regency during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study seeks to answer the forms of programmatic goods distributed in Sampang during the pandemic. This study employs qualitative methods and chose ten villages in Sampang as its case study due to Sampang's achievement in maintaining its green zone status for the longest period in East Java. This article shows that there have been shifts in the *bupati's* relationships with the village heads, from what was previously transactional prior to the pandemic to be

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more collaborative in efforts to contain the spread of the virus. This study also finds that the practice of distributive politics in Sampang during the pandemic fulfills the three criteria of programmatic politics: the accuracy of beneficiaries, transparency, and commitment to distribute goods without discrimination. The village heads in Sampang have acted as effective brokers in the implementation of village welfare programs, such as the installment of village volunteer posts against COVID-19, the free mask program for villagers, the BLT-Village Fund (BLT-DD) scheme targeting villagers from low-income households affected by the pandemic, the distribution of staple foods (*sembako*), the smart village program that provides free internet access in every village.

Keywords: Distributive politics, programmatic goods, pandemic, COVID-19.

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## INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, village heads (*kepala desa*) are expected to accumulate power resources and be highly respected by the community. The possession of power resources shapes the strength of village heads' influence in their villages. These power resources include religious knowledge (particularly Islam), expertise and skills, martial arts and mysticism, material wealth, social work, and social positions or status (Iberamsjah 2002, 75). As formal elites, village heads are hierarchically pushed to realize programs instructed from above, such as district heads (*camat*) and regents (*bupati*). However, on the other hand, their positions as informal elites require them to develop their own initiative to improve their villages. This means that village heads' statuses are not only affected by their formal authority, but also their traditional positions as *bapak pelindung* (godfathers) for their people (Tjiptoherijanto and Priyono 1983, 38).

The role of *bapak pelindung* is needed when villagers face danger, such as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. This particular role is vital in Java, which has been badly hit by the virus, with as many as 4,623 positive cases—just a little below Jakarta, which has 7,229 cases—as of May 30, 2020 (Bayhaqi 2020). The spike in positive cases did not only occur at provincial level, but also at city and regency levels. In East Java, there is at least one region that has been relatively successful in handling COVID-19: the Sampang Regency. Therefore, this study thus chooses to use Sampang as its case study to investigate the role of

village heads during the pandemic in relation to their connection to village residents and higher bureaucratic and political structures.

Sampang was able to maintain its green zone status (meaning an absence of confirmed positive cases) for the longest time compared to other areas in the province. The regency's first positive case—one person—was announced on May 13, 2020. The following graph captures the spread of the virus in Sampang:

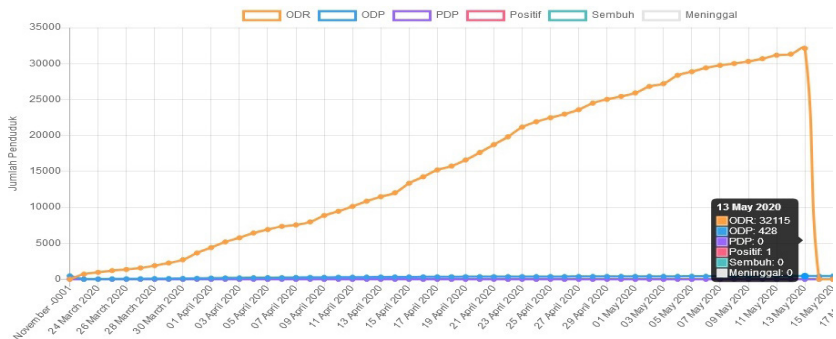


Figure 1. COVID-19 Cases in Sampang. *Source:* Sampang Government n.d.

*Bupati* of Sampang, Slamet Junaidi, said that the success to maintain the green zone status was due to his government's commitment in tracking both those who were at risk (*Orang Dalam Resiko*, ODR) and those under health monitoring (*Orang Dalam Pemantauan*, ODP) down to the village level. The *Bupati* also implemented a monitoring strategy called *blusukan* (unplanned visitations). He added that impromptu health checks were also commonly carried out at the regency, district, and village/sub-district levels. Checks at the later levels were done by village officials, medics from the *puskesmas* (community health centers) and village paramedics. Even the *Bhabinkamtibmas* (community police officers) and *Babinsa* (non-commissioned officers stationed in villages) were involved directly in these strategies (Taufiqurrahman 2020).

These programs were first implemented to anticipate the spread of COVID-19 and began with village heads' instructions to follow Circular Letter of *Bupati Sampang* No. 440/655/434.203/2020 on Precaution and Prevention of COVID-19. The policy encourages heads of villages to

distribute free masks and, in doing so, involves the production efforts of local small and medium-sized enterprises. Village heads were also permitted to utilize village funds (*dana desa*) to handle COVID-19 (Basri 2020). In fact, the *bupati* immediately instructed the village heads in Sampang to use their village funds to ensure that the people were safe and, more specifically, to prioritize policies aimed at containing the spread of the virus (Hidayat 2020).

Thus, we can say that the success of the responses to the pandemic in Sampang was heavily shaped by the role that the village heads played in implementing the regional government's policies. In Indonesia, village heads and officials are vital for implementing social welfare programs (Aspinall and Rohman 2017). For example, they take part in identifying the recipients of public goods and their distribution. The enlarging role of the village head was influenced by changes in political conditions in Indonesia. The power relationships between village elites and supra-village structures in *Reformasi* Era have changed; they were no longer as rigidly hierarchical as they were during the New Order. After *Reformasi*, these relationships were more mutual; while village heads were dependent on those structurally above the district heads and *bupati*, their superior officials were also dependent on village elites. Village heads have become more involved in pursuing government projects and acted as brokers in distributing resources for village development as well as the maintenance of political power (Aspinall and Rohman 2017, 52).

This article aims to elaborate on the success of the village heads in Sampang in implementing COVID-19 policies. More specifically, this article examines how public officials distributed resources through policies during the pandemic and contributed to Sampang's overall achievement. To explore how resources are allocated through policy enactment at the village level, this article employs the concept of distributive politics. Simply put, this concept indicates that political power (through its political institutions: the executive and legislative) works as avenues for politicians to distribute and allocate resources. What is meant by resources is any item that enables or empowers people in their

power relationships with the authority, which may be publicly elected politicians or bureaucrats. These resources may be viewed in both material and social terms (Wardani 2014).

There are two forms of distributive politics: programmatic and non-programmatic politics (Stokes et al. 2013). Previous studies on distributive politics in Indonesia tended to focus on non-programmatic goods—clientelism and partisan bias. Several of these literature studies depict this phenomenon in the context of political contestation (Aspinall and Sukmajati 2015; Haliim 2019; Palenewen 2014; Saragintan and Hidayat 2016). In elections, political parties or candidates will usually promise new policies that can bring material benefits for specific groups or classes. The benefits include, but are not limited to, fertilizers, farming subsidies, pension raises for the elderly, and scholarships for students from low-income families—some of these falls under the category of programmatic goods (Aspinall and Sukmajati 2015, 30).

The study conducted by Palenewen (2014) focused on patronage between candidates and voters during the legislative election in Bitung. This study looked at clientelistic strategies of non-programmatic politics: patronage, vote-buying, and constituency service. Voters who did not cast their votes for the candidates practicing these strategies were denied material benefits. Palenewen's (2014) study shows that most non-programmatic strategies employed by candidates have been relatively successful in bringing victory. Due to this finding, Palenewen (2014) did not inquire into programmatic strategies.

Two other studies looked at the partisan bias in the non-programmatic distribution in Banten (Saragintan and Hidayat 2016) and Kediri (Haliim 2019). They captured the process of resource allocation in the form of grants and social aid, which could be categorized as pork-barrel politics. What was unique from the Banten case was that these grants and aid were targeted towards religion-based groups. In the case of Kediri, the grants were not specifically targeted for certain groups but were rather seen as political maneuvers that incumbents employed nearing election day. Incumbents promised to increase the amount of funds

for social aid through *Prodamas* (community empowerment program) up to 100% if they were re-elected.

These studies demonstrate that non-programmatic distributions have high degrees of transactional characteristics, at least when viewed from the expectations of the regional elites enacting the distributive policies. This paper takes a different position by inquiring into the programmatic kind of distributive politics. More specifically, it shows that when public officials—in this case village heads—are faced with the dangers of the COVID-19 pandemic, the distribution of resources tends to be more programmatic. This study looks at the pandemic's effects on the village elites' decisions in distributing goods, particularly medical equipment through programs that aimed to control the pandemic, as well as working collaboratively—rather than transactionally—with the supra-village structures. Here we base our analysis on the handling of the pandemic in ten villages in Sampang, which was supported by information obtained from the *bupati* and the officials of the ten villages under study.

## THE THEORY OF DISTRIBUTIVE POLITICS AND THE CONCEPT OF PROGRAMMATIC GOODS

The concept of distributive politics emphasizes the type of available resources, which political actors typically distribute through policy programs. These programs provide material and social incentives for people's obedience and support (Hidayat, Prasetyo, and Yuwana 2018). Thus, the distribution of resources through the public policy model is highly intertwined with the interests of political actors. As previously discussed, Wardani (2014) defined distributive politics as an arena of resource allocation and distribution. These resources are defined as any item that may enable or empower people in their power relationships with other parties, such as politicians and public officials.

Thus, politics is inevitably highly intertwined with the distribution of resources. The distribution of resources in politics is even deemed more dynamic than the distribution of market goods from an economic perspective. In democratic states, there are agreements (though they may not be in the form of consensus) that the political authority possesses

the right to do inter-generational distribution of resources through tax, which funds education or social safety nets. There are also agreements for distributing resources through welfare programs of the provision or jobs (Stokes et al. 2013). Nevertheless, simultaneously, distributing resources to build and strengthen political ties with private companies and giving cash in exchange for votes have also been widely criticized. This shows that the distribution of resources in politics, on the one hand, is deemed widely acceptable by society. However, on the other hand, it is also condemned to the extent that many perpetrators have been criminally charged, particularly those taking part in vote-buying (Stokes et al. 2013).

Nic Cheeseman et al. (2014) said that programmatic politics is a vital part of electoral contestation. This approach is used when (typically incumbent) candidates (of political parties) emphasize the successes of their past policies that served the public interest as well as the political promises for the next term, with the hopes of gaining votes in upcoming elections. Thus, political actors do not rely solely on identity-based political strategies (usually based on ethnicity and religion), charisma, and patronage. Parties that employ programmatic political strategies usually do not only offer public policies that are in accordance with people's aspirations and interests, but also the parties' ideologies (Cheeseman et al. 2014). Kitschelt (1995) and Stokes (2007) differentiate programmatic politics and clientelism based on the beneficiaries of public policy (for example, health insurance, loans, and subsidized housing). In programmatic politics, beneficiaries are decided upon based on whether they fulfill the formal criteria to receive the goods and not because of their political affiliations. Clientelist politics, on the other hand, distribute goods mainly to the benefactors' supporters. The main difference is that candidates who practice programmatic politics distribute resources indiscriminately, even to those who support their rivals, while actors exercising non-programmatic politics do not (Mas'udi and Kurniawan 2017).

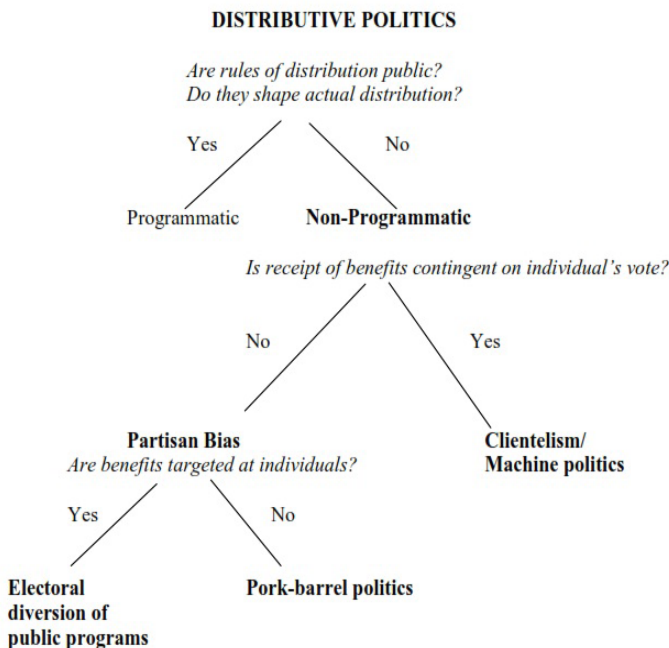
The concept of distributive politics says that the programmatic distribution of goods is done through government or state policies. It is



thus reasonable that distributive politics of this kind is more commonly carried out by incumbents aiming to run again for the next term (Harjanta 2018).

How can we analyze whether programmatic politics has been practiced during the COVID-19 pandemic in Sampang? This paper elaborates the indicators of programmatic goods to analyze this practice in the case of Sampang. As previously indicated, we shall elaborate these criteria by referring to Stoke’s (2009, 10) theories and Aspinall and Sukmajati’s (2015, 30) findings. The first is that the formulation of the policy’s aims is open to public debate. The second is that the distribution rules are official and public. Third, the actual distribution of goods follows the public criteria that have been made. The following figure illustrates the distribution of resources done by the government to the public (Stokes et al. 2013, 31):

Figure 2. The Concept of Distribute Politics



Source: Stokes et al. (2013).

The above figure shows that there are two forms of distributive politics: programmatic and non-programmatic politics. This study mainly aims to capture the distribution of programmatic goods in Sampang. The implementation of programmatic policies requires brokers, not to mobilize political support but rather mediate or bridge the interests of candidates and those of voters. Brokers play the role of gathering information, including regarding the problems that the people are facing—and in this case, particularly the needs of villagers who were impacted by COVID-19. The information that has been gathered would later be used to formulate solutions, which take the form of public policies.

Before the pandemic, studies on programmatic goods in Asian countries have also been carried out, such as in Japan (Catalinac 2015) and India (Wyatt 2013). In Japan's case, there has been a rise in campaigns for programmatic policies, mainly by LDP politicians, who focused on national security. One factor behind the popularization of programmatic politics in Japan is the change in Japan's electoral laws back in 1994. This shows that the rise of programmatic politics is not only shaped by voters' preferences. Catalinac (2015) also found that both incumbent and opposition candidates have tended to rely on programmatic politics in the past few years.

The case of Tamil Nadu, India, shows a shift in the distribution of goods, from previously clientelistic to highly programmatic. For the past six years, two of the largest parties in Tamil Nadu, All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), have been adopting programmatic politics. For example, the two parties provided free health insurance, affordable housing, and protection from the expropriation of slum areas. The two parties also opened shops that handed out free food and sold some commodities at affordable prices in the villages and cities. This program is known to provide food subsidies through the Public Distribution (PDS) program, in which the recipients were those who fell under the category of beneficiaries of programmatic policies. Party officials also implemented the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) and MGR Nutritious Noon Meal Scheme (NNMS). The ICDS aimed to

improve nutrition for infants, pregnant women, and breastfeeding mothers, while the NNMS provided free meals for school-aged children in Tamil Nadu (Wyatt 2013).

This article offers a new perspective from the previous studies on programmatic politics, particularly in Japan and India, by looking into the most recent developments during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the things that differentiate this situation from that of other contexts is its emergency and need for rapid and precise responses, which place political motives—which are usually at the center of non-programmatic politics—at the lowest end of the priority. Secondly, in the context of Indonesia, we mainly focus on programmatic politics, offering a different angle from those of the previous studies on distributive politics, which have tended to investigate the non-programmatic kind. Palenewen (2014) analyzed the process of resource allocation by elites and their parties—which used three methods: pork barrel politics, money politics, and constituency service—in the legislative elections in the city of Bitung. Aspinall and Sukmajati (2015) found five variations of patronage in non-programmatic distribution of resources during legislative elections in Indonesia. Saragintan and Hidayat's (2016) study on non-programmatic allocation of resources categorized the grants and social aid given out in Banten as a form of pork barrel politics that targeted religious groups. This article, thus, takes a different angle from the more established research of non-programmatic politics, as this study inquiries into programmatic distributive politics.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach and conducts a case study of 10 villages in Sampang, East Java. This case is selected because of the uniqueness of Sampang as it succeeded in maintaining the green zone status for the longest in the province. Another reason is that we have been acquainted with the informants, which eased our process of obtaining research permits and gathering data during the pandemic.

This article provides a descriptive analysis to present a detailed illustration of the phenomenon under study. As Denzin and Lincoln stated,

The word *qualitative* implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency. Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. (Denzin and Lincoln 2009, 10)

The phenomenon under study is the distribution of programmatic goods by local political actors at the village level during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the pandemic, data could not be obtained by fieldwork in the villages where the informants reside. Thus, the technique we employed to get around this issue was conducting in-depth interviews with informants who were familiar with the phenomenon via telephone. These informants were the *bupati* of Sampang and ten village heads in Sampang. Secondary data, such as news and documentation covering the handling of COVID-19 in Sampang, and related literature, were also assessed.

#### POWER RELATIONS BETWEEN VILLAGE HEADS AND *BUPATI* IN SAMPANG

When this article was written, regional governments were faced with the spread of the coronavirus disease. As formal leaders, both the *bupati* and village heads played a significant role in handling the pandemic because they possessed actual and potential power resources. According to Surbakti (2010), an individual is perceived to possess potential power if they have power resources such as wealth, land, weaponry, and social positions or status. An individual is said to have actual power when they have used these power resources in political activities to achieve his or her interests. In the case of Sampang, the public officials' interests were to save their people from the dangers of COVID-19.

During the crisis, the *bupati* and village heads were the local elites who collaborated to contain the spread of COVID-19. This emergency circumstance made their interactions inevitable. The pattern of interac-

tions and power relations between them was always present in implementing COVID-19 policies in the regency. Through his research on relations between village heads and the state, Nordholt (1987, 199) finds that village heads experience a duality of positions. On the one hand, village heads are elected by villages, which makes them accountable and necessitates them to cater to their villagers' interests. On the other hand, they are government officials whose job is to ensure the implementation of government policies.

An observation of the development of government regulations on villages from the New Order to the *reformasi* era reveals that the relationship between village heads and the state fluctuates depending on the political constellation between the central and local governments. This is because power relationships between political actors are influenced by the settings in which they exercise their powers. We shall now turn to the patterns of power relationships between village heads and the *bupati* to thoroughly illustrate this matter.

During the New Order, the state positioned villages as 'objects of co-optation' in its hegemonic style of politics through Law No. 5/1979. This law sustained the power of the New Order through centralization and stability and made the government structure hierarchical. Such a structure weakened the village, rendering it the lowest-level government unit and hindering its autonomy. The uniformity of villages could also mean that the power relationships between the regents and village heads were unequal in both their administrative and political aspects. Tjiptoherijanto and Prijono (1983) further explained that, in relation to their supra-village authorities, village heads tended to lose the traditional authority that mandated them to act as *bapak pelindung* to their villagers and initiators of their villages' democracy. Consequently, village heads became more dependent on the supra-village structures.

During the reform era, decentralization created a shift in power relations, not only between the central and local governments, but also between villages and their higher authorities. Law No. 22/1999 treated the village as an autonomous institution. Although the law did not explicitly state that the village has its own government structure, its recognition

of the village's historical and traditional rights meant that the village was recognized as an autonomous and legal entity (Maschab 2013, 141). This new definition not only positioned village heads as bureaucratic extensions of the supra-village structures (district heads, *bupati*, etc.) but also made the village head a political one. This amendment had implications for the power relations between the *bupati* and village head. The village head tended to be autonomous in running his government, and the *bupati* supervision was limited to administrative matters.

In the post-*reformasi* era, villages were regulated under Law No. 32/2004. Village governance was improved through the recentralization of administrative affairs and the increase of the village's institutional capacity, which was previously semi-autonomous, such as the appointment of the village secretary as a state employee. Another new rule was that district heads were no longer above village heads, nor were they the direct 'supervisor' (*pembina*) of village governance. It was the *bupati* who held this role and had the authority to appoint village heads (Maschab 2013, 151). Therefore, the relationship between the *bupati* and the village head became dominative-semi-autonomous. This is because the village head became accountable to the *bupati*, and, in return, the *bupati* needed the village head to maintain his/her power.

Table 1: Power Relations between the Village Heads and *Bupati*

Period	Law/Regulation	Regulated Matters	Relationship Type
New Order	Law No.5/1979 on Village Governance	Centralization	Domination-Subordinate
Reformation	Law No. 22/1999 on Regional Governance	Decentralization-Autonomy	Supervision-Autonomy
Post-Reformation	Law No. 32/2004 on Regional Governance	Autonomy- Limited	Domination-semi- autonomy
	Law No. 06/2014 on Villages	Decentralization-Autonomy	Dependency-Transactional

Note: Compiled from various sources.

The enactment of the most recent Law No. 6/2014 further improved the village head's leverage in local politics. Aspinall and Rohman (2017) said that village heads act as brokers of supra-village programs and effective vote-getters during elections, particularly when the villagers depend

upon the village heads for government aid and welfare programs. Thus, the strengthening of the village head's bargaining power contributes to the interdependent relationship between the village head and the *bupati*. This form of relationship is also similar to that of the transactional style of leadership.

The problems that occurred during the pandemic demand that regents and village heads realize programs effectively to prevent the spread of the virus. The interactions between the two were evident when the *bupati* issued a circular letter to all village heads, asking them to increase their awareness of the risks of COVID-19. In this circular letter, the *bupati* instructed all village heads to immediately utilize their village funds for COVID-19 handling at the village level (Basri 2020). As political elites, they need to formulate effective policies, and successful implementation requires highly committed local leaders. As previously explained, the shift in elite power relationships after the *reformasi* affected the relationships between village heads and the state (i.e., heads of districts and regents), making them more mutually dependent upon each other and allowing them to be more transactional (table 1). Aspinall and Rohman (2017) highlighted the shifts in power relationships since the enactment of Law No. 6/2014, where the relationships between village heads and the state have become more fluid from what was previously more rigid and hierarchical. Village heads now have more leverage in politics because while they need the *bupati*, the *bupati* also needs the village heads' support.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the relationship between the *bupati* and village leaders became relatively more equal due to the collaboration between them in handling the virus. As explained by the head of Taman Village, Sampang's achievement in maintaining its green zone status was heavily shaped by the role of both the people and government.

“I particularly appreciate *Pak Bupati* (of) Sampang. He has been very motivated in visiting the villages, even up until 2:00 AM. He even went to the areas bordering Sampang and Bangkalan. All these

borders were consistently monitored by the *bupati*. He also monitored the implementation of both the programs from the Sampang government and village heads. So, I did not only hear about the hard work of the Sampang government; I experienced it myself.”. (Muarif, Head of Taman Village, May 15, 2020. Interviewed by Author. Sampang)

The Sampang *bupati* said that his region’s achievement in maintaining its green zone status for the most prolonged period in East Java was a straight fact. According to him, this success was due to earlier anticipation before any formal instructions from the central government were issued to Sampang. An example of this was the formulation of guidelines for all state employees and heads of state agencies in Sampang who were attending meetings outside the regency as well as the obligation to obtain permits from the *bupati* when they do so. He also employed a strategy to teach and urge the people to follow physical distancing measures, which entailed the building of three command posts (*Posko*) at the regency level, fourteen at the district level, and posts in each village. The village heads worked in cooperation with community health centers to collect data and monitor the mobility of incoming travelers, who were regarded as persons under risk. The enactment of these procedures has contributed to Sampang’s ability to stay in the green zone (Slamet Junaidi, Regent of Sampang. April 14, 2020. Interviewed by Author. Sampang).

This emergence of such collaborative power relationships between the *bupati* and village heads during the pandemic was a different phenomenon from the ones found by previous studies, which showed relationships during ‘normal times’ and are more transactional or used to serve the self-interests of those of certain groups and party elites (Aspinall and Rohman 2017; Kuncoro 2013; Muslim 2016, 76). As a local political elite, the *bupati* acknowledges that he is not able to control the spread of COVID-19 without the involvement of the village heads. Similarly, the village heads need support from the regency to protect their villagers from the virus in the form of government programs. If



the village heads fail keeping their villagers safe, they may lose their influence in their respective villages. Thus, if the previous relationships between the village heads and *bupati* were transactional, they have shifted to become more collaborative during the pandemic. If they succeed in containing the spread of the virus and maintain their green zone status, their legitimacy will be strengthened.

#### PROGRAMMATIC GOODS DURING THE PANDEMIC IN SAMPANG

In the previous sections, we have discussed that programmatic goods refer to resources distributed by regional governments to aid the people, particularly, in this context, those heavily impacted by COVID-19 in Sampang. These programs were ideally formulated based on problems identified by the village authority, followed by the village heads' recommendation of programmatic goods, which were then sent to the supra-village structures or regency government. If we view this from a distributive politics perspective, programmatic politics is different from the practice of patronage-clientelism, which is defined as the distribution of goods with the intention of getting votes or winning elections. Programmatic goods, on the other hand, are not distributed to mobilize the electorate.

Patronage falls under the category of non-programmatic politics. Several examples of this practice include the provision of cash, goods, services, and other economic benefits (e.g., employment or contracts) from politicians' own finances or pork barrel projects (Aspinall and Sukmajati 2014). Conversely, programmatic goods during the pandemic—such as healthcare—were more targeted towards the villagers' safety.

Here we further elaborate that programmatic distributive politics consists of three criteria. First is the accuracy of the programs' beneficiaries. The second is the open nature of the information on the programs formulated to address public problems. The third is the commitment to implement programs without discrimination.

The Sampang government implemented several strategies in combating COVID-19. These included the *bupati's* immediate instruction

for village heads to make use of the available resources to contain the spread of COVID-19. These instructions were based on the Minister of Villages' Regulation No. 6/2020 on the Prioritization of the Use of Village Funds, allowing village authorities to use village funds to handle COVID-19 (Slamet Junaidi, Regent of Sampang, April 14, 2020. Interviewed by Author. Sampang). Village authorities receive *dana desa* (DD) not only from the central government—through the Ministry of Village, Development of Disadvantaged Regions and Transmigration—but also from the regional budget through *alokasi dana desa* (ADD).

Using the theory of distributive politics, the DD and ADD can be categorized as material resources for the medical countermeasures and the mitigation of economic impacts for villagers who lost their income. In the context of public policy, it is part of the strategic utilization of resources to mitigate public problems. It is also one of the forms of continuous intervention by the government to cater to the interests of the vulnerable and help them survive and participate in the governance (Chandler and Plano 1988). Table 2 below shows that there has been an increase in the allocation of ADD and DD in Sampang during the COVID-19 pandemic, compared to the funding in the two previous years.

Table 2. ADD and DD Allocation in Sampang, from 2018–2020

Component	2018	2019	2020
<i>Alokasi Dana Desa (ADD)</i>	89,064,000,000	94,029,837,000	94,449,560,000
<i>Dana Desa (DD)</i>	179,206,655,000	232,543,589,000	233,187,661,000

Note: Compiled from various sources.

The distribution of material resources through DD and ADD required executors. In this case, they were the village heads who acted as brokers for these government programs and held strategic positions in the distribution of resources (through these programs) during the pandemic. This is because the Ministry of Villages, through Regulation No. 6/2020 and Circular Letter No. 8/2020 on the COVID-19 Response Village (*Desa Tanggap COVID-19*) appoints village heads as the head of volunteers in the *Desa Lawan COVID-19* (loosely translated as Villages against COVID-19) program. Village heads were also appointed as persons in charge and tasked to gather information on villagers who

were entitled to receive direct cash transfers. Based on our interviews with several village leaders, welfare programs for the people were not only initiated by the state government, but also other parties such as the military, police, and state-owned and private companies (Village Heads in Sampang Regency, pers. comm. May 14–15, 2020).

I will now further elaborate on the distribution of programmatic goods in Sampang during the pandemic. The first program was the setting up of volunteer posts in every village in Sampang. The village heads acted as the head of the villages' volunteer team, which was tasked to form posts as well as gather information on homecoming travelers (also known as *pemudik*). These volunteers were also tasked to socialize the four coordination agreements made between the *bupati*, the Islamic clerics, and *Forum Komunikasi Pimpinan Daerah* (the Regional Leadership Communication Forum) in Sampang to the people. These agreements were the prohibitions to hold *imtihan*<sup>1</sup>, celebrations for *Isra' Miraj*, wedding receptions, and mass gatherings that exceeded thirty people (Slamet Junaidi, Regent of Sampang. April 14, 2020. Interviewed by Author. Sampang). All the interviewed village heads said that the posts were built at the village council, and there was always somebody at these posts to anticipate sudden inspections from the regency authority, as the *bupati* often carried out *blusukan* to the villages. The village heads said that the volunteers' operational funds were from the DD and ADD. These funds were used to disinfect public spaces, the installment of washbasins and sterilization cubicles, and the provision of logistics such as meals and cigarettes for the volunteers. Several village heads also had to use their personal expenses to fund the operations of the volunteer teams (Zainuddin, Head of Bapelle Village. May 14, 2020. Interviewed by Author. Sampang).

The installment of posts and the formation of volunteer teams meet the criteria of programmatic goods, particularly the criterion about the

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<sup>1</sup> *Haflatul Imtihan* is an act of gratitude for the end of exams. This tradition is deemed to hold deep sociological values and consists of engaging events. The celebration is normally held by Islamic boarding schools, but people living around the schools are also usually involved. Activities that are usually held throughout the week include religious competitions and sports, such as poetry reading, recitation of the *kitab kuning* (lit: yellow book), and soccer. See Faisol 2016.

indiscriminate nature of the distribution. An example of this is the provision of village hotlines for emergencies. The implementation of this policy resulted from a discussion between the village heads and public figures in the regency. This discussion meant that information was open and that the village heads were responsible for the socialization (*sosialisasi*) of the policy to their villagers. The village authority was committed to not discriminate in its provision of these programs. This was demonstrated in the case of Panggung Village, in which the volunteer team was involved in arranging the funeral of a villager who was a patient under supervision (*Pasien Dalam Pengawasan* or PDP) and died in Surabaya, which was a red zone at the time. Although the village head was harshly scolded by the Sampang government for the burial permit, he confirmed that there had been no rejections from his villagers about the matter as the convoy of cars that escorted the deceased was told to return to Surabaya after the burial immediately. They also followed the *bupati's* instructions not to gather in crowds (Subaidi, Head of Panggung Village. May 14, 2020. Interviewed by Author. Sampang).

The second was the free masks program. Our interview with the *bupati* of Sampang reveals that the funding for distributing masks at the village level could be sourced from the village funds. Therefore, village heads were expected to purchase cotton masks produced by local tailors from their villages (Slamet Junaidi, Regent of Sampang, April 14, 2020. Interviewed by Author. Sampang). This distribution was supported by each village's volunteer team. However, several village heads were directly involved in handing out masks to the villagers to showcase their seriousness and care. Following the *bupati's* programs, the majority of village heads provided a minimum of two washable masks, and the production of masks was done by the villages' local tailors, but in the case of shortage, village authorities were able to purchase from tailors at other villages from the same district. The implication of this policy—apart from health-related benefits—was that it aided the economy and helped micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises that experienced slumps in sales due to the pandemic. These masks fall

under the category of programmatic goods as they were provided to all villagers without discrimination. Village heads and volunteer teams were optimistic that the villagers were aware of the necessity of wearing masks, especially after socialization efforts by the village authorities.

Third was the cash transfer program (*Bantuan Langsung Tunai-Dana Desa* or BLT-DD) for villagers in Sampang. The money was given out in cash in sixty villages before Eid al-Fitr, and via bank transfer in 120 villages after Eid. This program's recipients were legally made transparent, qualifying the program as a programmatic good. According to the Minister of Villages' Regulation No. 6/2020, villagers entitled to receive BLT-DD are those from low income-households and are not registered as recipients of the *Program Keluarga Harapan* (PKH) or *Bantuan Pangan Non-Tunai* (BPNT) schemes, have lost their sources of income due to COVID-19, and/or have family members who are (or are likely to become) chronically ill.

However, it has also been asked whether there has been discrimination and a lack of transparency in the distribution of these cash transfers. This was reflected in the demonstrations by several non-governmental organizations (NGOs), who demanded transparency and acceleration in the distribution of the transfers. These demonstrations were held at two locations, the Community and Village Empowerment Agency (*Dinas Pemberdayaan Masyarakat dan Desa* or DPMD)—where the NGOs demanded that the head of the agency, Malik Amrullah, step down from his position—and the Robatal District. The management of the Association of Village Heads (*Asosiasi Kepala Desa* or AKD) made attempts to meet the protesting activists in a formal hearing. However, the activists rejected the offer because their protests were directed towards the head of the DPMD and head of the Robatal District (Regamedianews 2020).

In the case of the demonstrations at the Robatal District office, Abdul Hamid, the head of the Robatal AKD, clarified that no discrimination has occurred during the distribution of the BLT-DD and the list of cash recipients have been publicly discussed through *musyawarah desa*, where the public could access information on who the recipients were. He added that while the exchange between him and the demon-

strators went emotional, it was mainly a matter of communication. To Abdul Hamid, nearly 90% of the BLT-DD transfers were accurate, and if any mistakes happened, they were not intentional. Accidents were possible mainly because the BLT-DD distribution almost coincided with the gathering of additional data for the *Program Keluarga Harapan* scheme from the central government. It was thus possible that some people received both the benefits of the BLT-DD and the PKH (Abdul Hamid, Head of the Robatal District AKD. June 13, 2020. Interviewed by Author. Sampang).

The fourth program was the distribution of grocery packages for villagers in Sampang. For this program, village heads organized and gathered packages from various sources, such as the central government (who provided the BPNT), the regency government, the police, the military, and state as well as private companies. As brokers of this aid program, village heads gathered data on those entitled to receive the aid packages. This process was followed by the strategy of putting stickers on the houses of these recipients to show that they have received the aid. In distributing aid packages from the regency government, a 'by name, by address' data-gathering scheme was used to allocate prioritized packages for art communities in the villages. The distribution of these packages is a form of programmatic politics because its allocation is in accordance with the list of rightful recipients. However, several village leaders complained that the number of packages, from both the government and other sources, was insufficient to meet everyone's needs. To deal with this problem, some had to use their own money to fund additional packages. This was done out of commitment and to show there was no discrimination in the distribution of aid, although the village heads were reluctant to reveal who received the packages that were bought using their personal expenses due to privacy.

The fifth was the *Desa Pintar* (Smart Village) program that provides free internet to those impacted by the pandemic in Sampang. The pandemic has made the governments of areas in the red zone enact Large-Scale Social Restrictions (*Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar* or PSBB), which prohibited people from going back to their hometowns.

In the case of Sampang, village heads said that they advised their people who were still in the red zones not to come home temporarily. People resorted to meet virtually through the internet instead. Previously, the Sampang government has installed internet towers in every village. A village head said that this program has been beneficial during the pandemic, as there has been an increase in the number of people who communicated with their families through Whatsapp (Siban, Head of the Disanah Village. May 14, 2020. Interviewed by Author. Sampang). The free internet program also fulfills the criteria of the programmatic goods. This is because all villagers were able to access its benefits. To avoid discrimination in the provision of internet services, the regency government has prohibited any installment of (additional) routers close to the houses of village leaders. Nearly all the main internet towers were built at the village councils.

The range of the signal is quite varied in the villages; in some villages, the signal was able to cover the entire village with the installment of additional routers in every hamlet (*dusun*), in some the signal was only accessible from a close distance from the village authority's offices. In contrast, in some others the internet connection was terribly slow that nobody could virtually use it, such as in Labang Village and Rapa Laok Village. All the village heads said that the free internet program was funded through the village funds scheme. Before the formulation and enactment of the scheme, a public discussion (*musyawarah desa*) was held to socialize the program and involve the people in the process. The conditions of the internet towers in Sampang can be observed in the following table:

Most programmatic policies at the village level in Sampang during the pandemic were funded through the DD and the ADD schemes. These policies will indirectly shape political support for the incumbent village heads and the *bupati* if they are to run again for public office, with the condition that the benefits of the policies have been received by all the members of their respective villages. The effective implementation of the programs is likely to strengthen the village heads' and the *bupati's* legitimacy, giving them an edge in the next election.

Table 3. *Desa Pintar* Program in Sampang

Village	District	Tower	Signal Coverage
Jelgung	Robatal	Built - Functioning	Entire village
Bapelle	Robatal	Built - Functioning	Village council
Noreh	Sreseh	Built - Functioning	Village council
Disanah	Sreseh	Built - Functioning	Entire village
Labang	Sreseh	Built - Non-functioning	None
Rapa Laok	Omben	Built - Non-functioning	None
Napo Daya	Omben	Built - Functioning	Village council
Taman	Jrengik	Built - Functioning	Village council
Mlaka	Jrengik	Built - Functioning	Village council
Panggung	Sampang	Built - Functioning	Village council

Sources: Interviews with the Respective Village Heads.

Interviews with the village heads and the *bupati* have revealed that the primary motivation behind the channeling of the DD and the ADD funds was programmatic rather than non-programmatic (patronage, clientelism, and pork barrel politics). This shows that the village heads, on the one hand, have been hierarchically accountable to the supra-village structures regarding the realization of government aid programs for the people during the pandemic. On the other hand, they have also maintained their informal authority as the patron for their clients—their people—or as *bapak pelindung desa* by protecting their people from the pandemic risk. These tasks were carried out through the distribution of programmatic goods.

## CONCLUSION

This article finds that Sampang's achievement in maintaining its green zone status for the longest period in East Java was due to the collaboration among local political elites in implementing programmatic policies to handle the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the three criteria of programmatic goods, there were at least five programmatic policies in Sampang's villages. The first policy was the installment of volunteer posts to handle matters relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. The second was the distribution of free masks to villagers. The third program was the transfer of BLT-DD for people from low-income households and those impacted by the pandemic. The fourth was the distribution of aid packages, and the fifth was the provision of free internet across the



villages. The case of Sampang demonstrated the role of village heads in distributing resources through programmatic politics by meeting three criteria. These criteria were 1) accuracy in the distribution of policy benefits; 2) the public nature of the information on the enacted policies; and 3) commitment to implement the formulated policies without discrimination (Aspinall and Sukmajati 2015; Stokes 2009).

This study also discovers that the village heads in Sampang have acted as effective brokers in distributing programmatic goods from the supra-village bureaucracy—the head of districts and the *bupati*—to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, the relationships between the *bupati* and village heads have shown to be more collaborative in maximizing the use of power resources to contain the spread of the virus. The pandemic has contributed to the shaping of these collaborative relationships through programmatic politics and lessened the likelihood for the transactional relations more commonly associated with non-programmatic politics.

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