

Multidimensional Poverty and Social Protection Policies in ASEAN Member States: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

The present paper is a review-based research paper. The research article examines recent studies on multidimensional poverty in Southeast Asian countries. The paper analyzes and focuses on the conceptualization and measurement of multidimensional poverty, as well as the determinants and consequences of poverty in the ASEAN region. This paper is an attempt to study the present social protection programmes for the eradication of poverty implemented in ASEAN member state countries. The study has revealed that poverty in Southeast Asia is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon, with both rural and urban areas facing significant challenges. The researcher has used a literature review-based method wherein articles published in Scopus database are used and classified based on the keywords, content, and context of the study. The present research article involves the recent studies on poverty and social protection programmes in ASEAN member states. The ASEAN member states (AMS) have formulated various policies for addressing multidimensional poverty. The well-known and effective programmes for social protection and poverty alleviation programmes are classified according to their criteria and area of impact in a table. This review finds that the poverty alleviation programmes focus mostly on social insurance and social security in ASEAN member states and that there are very few or hardly any programmes especially focusing on poverty and the ten indicators of poverty suggested by the Alkheri method of multidimensional poverty. The paper concludes by identifying key gaps in current research, implementing policies, and highlighting areas for future research.

Keywords: Multidimensional poverty, Social protection programmes, ASEAN member states, Poverty eradication.

Introduction

Poverty remains a major challenge in Southeast Asia, despite significant economic growth and development in recent decades. While poverty rates have declined overall, there remain significant disparities between and within countries in the region. Moreover, poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon that extends beyond income, encompassing factors such as health, education, and social exclusion. As such, a comprehensive understanding of poverty in Southeast Asia requires a multidimensional approach. This paper contributes to the longstanding literature on multidimensional poverty in Southeast Asian countries, focusing on the conceptualization and measurement of poverty, as well as its determinants and consequences and its correlation with social protection programmes implemented in AMS. The present paper analyzes the multidimensional poverty and social protection programmes implemented in AMS.

ASEAN Member States

According to ASEAN Development Outlook (2021) ASEAN, or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, is a regional intergovernmental organization consisting of ten-member states in Southeast Asia. The member states include Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. ASEAN was founded on 8th August 1967, with the signing of the Bangkok Declaration by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. Brunei Darussalam joined in 1984, Vietnam in 1995, Laos and Myanmar in 1997 and Cambodia in 1999. The objective of ASEAN is to promote economic growth, social progress, cultural development, and regional peace and stability. ASEAN also aims to promote cooperation and

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collaboration between its member states in various fields, including trade, investment, technology, education, and tourism. ASEAN has become an important player in the global economy, with a combined GDP of over US\$3 trillion, making it the sixth-largest economy in the world. It has also established strong ties with other countries and regions, including China, Japan, South Korea, India, and the European Union.

Understanding Multidimensional Poverty

Poverty has probably always been characterized as a multidimensional problem, but nationally it has been calculated only through the income dimension, as income was considered the source of consumption and expenditure. The understanding was that income level could enhance the capacities of people to attain minimum levels of basic needs like food, clothing, and shelter. But it was always debated and there was an understanding and agreement regarding the insufficiency of income poverty measures and indicators (Sen, (1992). Poverty itself is a complex term as poverty can be understood by different dimensions and indicators. The question of who is poor and what constitutes poverty in a society always remained a debate among researchers. For Sen (1976), in a unidirectional income pace the poverty line is determined by the income necessary to buy basic needs like goods and services, which can differentiate groups into poor and non-poor. Thus, income was considered the only dimension of poverty. However, this is incomplete. In a multidimensional poverty framework, the identification of the poor is more complex.

Poverty can also be time-dependent, it can be temporary, acute, short-term, or persistent and chronic in nature. It is a long-lasting risk for those who are above the poverty line, and it can be a trap for those who live in it permanently. Lack of different amenities can result in poverty. It may be the result of inadequate income, or unfulfilled basic needs such as healthcare, education, and or housing. But poverty is also subjective in nature and includes feelings of deprivation, vulnerability, exclusion, shame, pain, and other forms of ill-being. Nonetheless, poverty is a result of a lack of means, capabilities, freedom, and options for a better future (Gonner et al.2007).

The Alkire method of Multidimensional poverty (also known as MPI Multidimensional Poverty Index) is a measure of poverty that considers multiple deprivations experienced by individuals or households. It was developed by Sabina Alkire and James Foster in 2010 and has since been used by governments and organizations around the world to identify and address multidimensional poverty. The Alkire method uses 10 indicators to measure poverty across three dimensions: health, education, and living standards. The indicators are chosen based on their relevance to poverty in a particular context and may include factors such as access to clean water, education level, school attendance, child mortality, nutrition, cooking fuel, sanitation, water, electricity, floor, and ownership of assets. Each indicator is given equal weight within its dimension and the dimensions are also given equal weight to calculate the MPI. Households are first identified as deprived or non-deprived in each indicator. A household is considered deprived in an indicator if they do not meet a predetermined threshold for that indicator (for example, if they do not have access to clean water). Once deprivation has been identified for all indicators, a household is considered multidimensionally poor if they are deprived in at least one-third of the indicators within each dimension (i.e., at least one health indicator, one education indicator, and one living standards indicator). The MPI can be used to track changes in poverty over time, and to identify the most deprived regions or populations within a country. It is also useful for targeting interventions to address specific deprivations experienced by poor households (Alkire, S., & Foster, J. 2011). This approach recognizes that poverty is not just about income, but also encompasses factors such as health, education, and social exclusion. Several frameworks have been proposed to conceptualize multidimensional poverty in the region. These include the Alkire-Foster method, the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), and the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI). These frameworks use a range of indicators to capture different dimensions of poverty, such as nutrition, education, and access to basic services. The present study focuses on the Alkire-Foster method's three dimensions and ten indicators and the social protection programmes implemented for the eradication of poverty in AMS.

Understanding the theoretical framework of Social Protection

Social protection refers to a set of policies and programs designed to protect individuals and households from the economic risks and shocks associated with poverty, unemployment, illness, disability, old age, and other social contingencies. There are several theories that underpin social protection, each with its own set of assumptions, principles, and objectives. In this response, the research paper outlines four major social protection theories and provides references for further study. According to Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler, (2004), the risk management theory views social protection as a mechanism for managing the risks and uncertainties that individuals and households face in their daily lives. According to this perspective, social protection should aim to mitigate the impact of shocks and help people cope with vulnerabilities. Risk management theory emphasizes the importance of providing social protection to vulnerable groups, such as children, the elderly, and people with disabilities who are most vulnerable to experiencing adverse events. Similarly, the human capital theory argues that social protection can help individuals and households to invest in their own human capital, such as education, health, and training, which can lead to increased productivity and improved well-being. According to this perspective, social protection should be designed to promote human capital development by providing access to quality education, health care, and training, as well as income support to help individuals invest in their own skills and capabilities (Hoddinott et al., 2012). Nonetheless, the human capital theory holds that social protection is shaped by political and economic factors, including the distribution of power and resources in society. According to this perspective, social protection policies are influenced by the interests and preferences of different actors, including governments, donors, and civil society organizations, as well as broader economic trends and global governance structures. The political economy theory emphasizes the need to analyze the political and economic context in which social protection policies are developed and implemented, to understand the drivers of policy change and the implications for different stakeholders (Roelen et al., 2014).

Methodology

Research Scope

The fundamental goal of this research paper is to review multidimensional poverty and social protection programmes in ASEAN member states. For this study a narrative review was constructed that focuses on multidimensional poverty and the social protection programmes formulated by AMS. The present article is a Literature Review-Based Study on Multidimensional Poverty and Social Protection Policies in the ASEAN Member States: with Research Questions such as: "What is the current state of research on multidimensional poverty and social protection policies in ASEAN member states?"

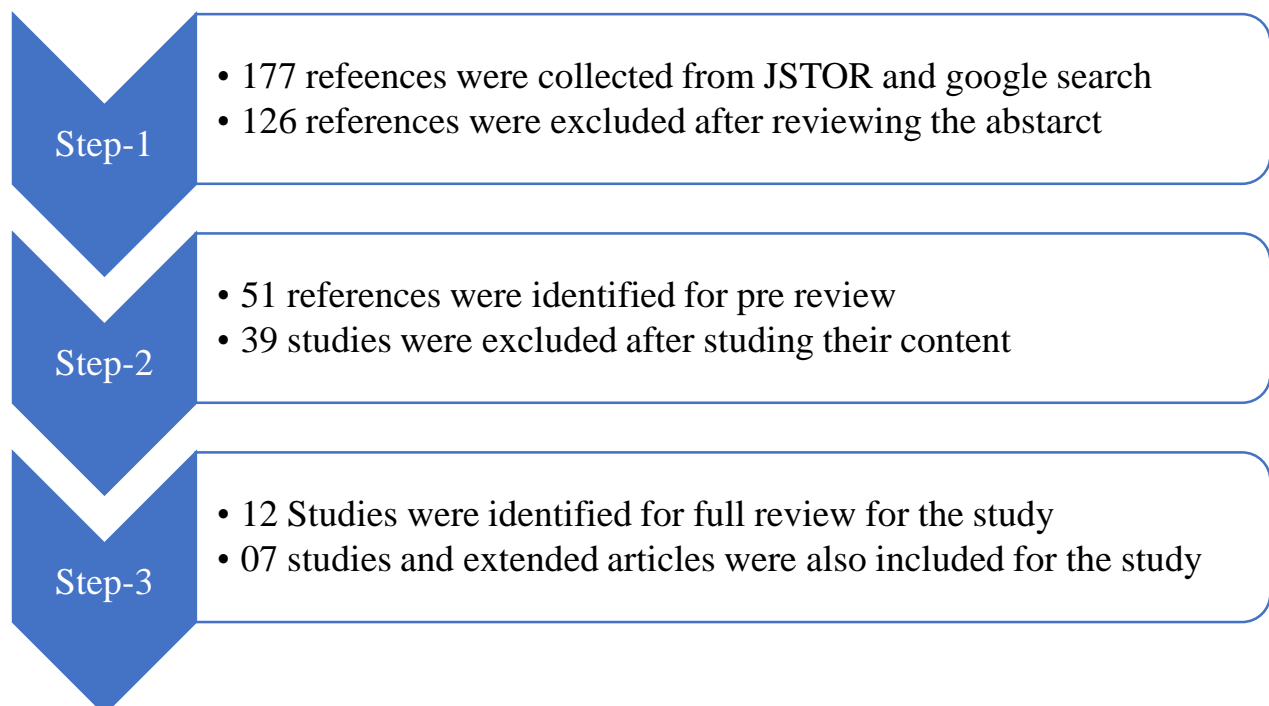
Data collection procedure

1. Step 1 Identifying research areas of interest h: in this step the researcher identified the research articles that were published in relation to the research question. The research articles were then studied and analyzed for key words like multidimensional poverty, ASEAN members states and multidimensional poverty, policy, and programmes on poverty. The contents of the abstracts were considered for the selection process.
2. Step 2 Narrowing down the research articles to the scope of the research topic: after identifying different articles and research studies r according to the thematic area and research question, the content was narrowed down to those articles highlighting the programmes and policies for poverty in ASEAM member states.
3. Step 3 Extracting the relevant studies: In this step the selected references from step 2 were again reviewed to see whether the study included thematic areas of multidimensional poverty or social protection programmes in ASEAN member states. Many articles were not published within the timeframe of 2010 to 2023.

Table 1 Data Collection Criteria and Process used

Step-1 Finding the scope for research through major thematic keywords	Step-2 Narrowing down research studies to the scope of research	Step-3 Extracting the relevant studies
Multidimensional poverty, social protection programmes, ASEAN member states	Multidimensional Poverty in ASEAN member states Social Protection programmes focusing on multidimensional poverty in ASEAN member states	Searched for benchmark studies and already published studies, with suitable studies were selected for further analysis.

Source: Table generated by researcher.

Table 2 Process of identifying and selecting the study references

Literature Review Strategy

A comprehensive search strategy has been used to identify relevant literature on multidimensional poverty and social protection policies in ASEAN member states. The search has involved JSTOR databases. The search terms have included keywords related to multidimensional poverty, social protection policies, ASEAN member states. The researcher found 177 search results for Multidimensional Poverty in ASEAN member states.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria for selecting the literature have followed: peer-reviewed articles, published between 2010 and 2023, written in the English language, and focused on multidimensional poverty and social protection policies in ASEAN member states. The exclusion criteria were literature that does not meet the inclusion criteria was deleted.

The researcher classified the articles according to their sources shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Sources and numbers of studies

Sr.No	Sources	No of studies
1	Academic Journals	122
2	Book chapters	15
3	Research reports	26
4	Serials	11
5	Documents	03
	Total	177

Synthesis of Findings

The findings of the literature review have been synthesized into a coherent narrative. The synthesis has involved identifying common themes and patterns in literature and presenting them in a structured and organized manner.

Table 4 Summary of selected references

Research areas	Identified references	Additional references
Multidimensional Poverty	Alkire, S., & Foster, J. (2011), Alkire, S., & Foster, J. E. (2011a), United Nations Development Programme. (2019), Summer, A., & Mallett, R. (2019), ASEAN Development Outlook (2021),	Sen, A. K. (1992), Sen, A. K. (1976), Gönner, C., Haug, M., Cahyat, A., Wollenberg, E., de Jong, W., Limberg, G., Cronkleton, P., Moeliono, M., & Becker, M. (2007), Alkire, S., & Foster, J. (2011).
Social Protection Programmes	World Bank (2020), Hoddinott, J., Maluccio, J. A., Behrman, J. R., Flores, R., Martorell, R., & Quisumbing, A. R. (2012), Roelen, K., Devereux, S., & Abdoulayi, D. (2014), ASEAN. (2014), ASEAN Secretariat's Statistical Yearbook 2020, Asian Development Bank. (2020), World Bank. (2021), World Bank. (2021). Malaysia, World Bank. (2021). Indonesia	Devereux, S., & Sabates-Wheeler, R. (2004), ASEAN. (2014).
Total	13	06

Limitations

The limitations of the literature review have been discussed. These limitations include the quality of the literature, the scope of the search, and potential biases in the data collection and analysis.

Social Protection GDP expenditure in ASEAN

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) defines social protection as a set of public and private policies and programs aimed at preventing, reducing, and eliminating poverty and vulnerability, promoting social justice and equity, and ensuring that all individuals and communities have access to basic services, including health care, education, housing, and social assistance. ASEAN

social protection includes a range of programs and initiatives such as cash transfers, social insurance schemes, labor market interventions, and social welfare services. These programs are designed to address different forms of risks and vulnerabilities, such as unemployment, disability, old age, illness, and natural disasters. In ASEAN Framework on Social Protection, which was adopted in 2014, provides guidance and principles for member states to develop and implement effective and inclusive social protection systems. It emphasizes the importance of a comprehensive and coordinated approach to social protection that considers the needs and priorities of different population groups, including women, children, older persons, and persons with disabilities (ASEAN framework on social protection, 2014).

According to the ASEAN Secretariat's Statistical Yearbook (2020), social protection policies and programs focus on reducing poverty and vulnerability by aiding individuals and households in areas such as healthcare, education, housing, and income support.

Table 5 Country, GDP Expenditure and GINI Coefficient

Country	GDP Expenditure on Social Protection	GINI coefficient
Brunei	0.6	n.a.
Cambodia	1.2	0.290 (2017)
Indonesia	1.3	0.393 (2017)
Lao PDR	2.3	0.362 (2013)
Malaysia	1.1	0.399 (2016)
Myanmar	0.5	0.300 (2017)
Philippines	1.8	0.444 (2015)
Singapore	2.5	0.458 (2018)
Thailand	1.4	0.453 (2017)
Vietnam	2.4	0.424 (2018)

Source: (The author has developed the table using the data from ASEAN Secretariat's Statistical Yearbook 2020)

From the table, we can see that the ASEAN member states vary significantly in their GDP expenditure on social protection. The country with the highest GDP expenditure on social protection as a percentage of GDP is Singapore, at 2.5%, followed by Vietnam at 2.4%. On the other hand, Brunei and Myanmar have the lowest GDP expenditure on social protection, at 0.6% and 0.5%, respectively. Similarly, it can be revealed from the table that Singapore has the highest income inequality, and it spends 2.5% of its GDP on social protection. Thailand has the second highest inequality, with a GINI value of 0.453, and utilizes 1.4 % of its GDP on social protection. However, the Philippines is third among ASEAN member states in income inequality with a GINI value of 0.444 and a significantly less social protection spending, utilizing just 1.8% of total GDP. Thus, it can be concluded from the table that ASEAN member states need to work on eradicating income inequality and building up more robust, efficient, and effective social protection policies with a higher percentage of investment in their GDP. It is also important to note that these figures represent only a portion of the overall social protection spending in each country, as some programs may be funded through other sources such as donor aid or private sector contributions. Additionally, the effectiveness of social protection programs depends not only on the level of funding but also on the design and program efficiency.

Social Protection Programs in ASEAN Member States

Brunei Darussalam, officially known as the Nation of Brunei, the Abode of Peace, is a small country located on the island of Borneo in Southeast Asia. The government of Brunei has implemented various social protection policies to support its citizens and residents. Below are some of the key social protection policies of Brunei.

1. National Old Age Pension Scheme: This program provides financial assistance to Bruneian citizens aged 60 and above who have little or no income. The amount of the pension is based on the number of years the applicant has been contributing to the scheme.
2. Disability Allowance Scheme: This program provides financial assistance to Bruneian citizens who are permanently disabled and are unable to work. The amount of the allowance is based on the severity of the disability and the applicant's income.
3. Public Assistance Scheme: This program provides financial assistance to Bruneian citizens who are facing economic hardship and have no other means of support. The amount of assistance is based on the applicant's income and expenses.
4. Public Assistance Scheme: This program provides financial assistance to Bruneian citizens who require medical treatment but cannot afford the cost. The amount of the assistance is based on the cost of the treatment and the applicant's income.
5. National Healthcare System: Brunei has a national healthcare system that provides free healthcare services to its citizens and residents. The government has invested heavily in healthcare infrastructure, including hospitals and clinics, and has also implemented health education and promotion programs to improve the health outcomes of its people.
6. Schooling Assistance Scheme: This program provides financial assistance to Bruneian citizens who need financial support to cover the costs of their children's education. The amount of assistance is based on the applicant's income and the number of children in school.
7. Child Allowance: Brunei provides a child allowance to families with children under the age of 15. The allowance is intended to help families meet the basic needs of their children, such as food, clothing, and education.
8. Unemployment Benefit: Brunei provides unemployment benefits to citizens and permanent residents who have lost their jobs and are unable to find new employment. The benefit is intended to provide financial support to people who are temporarily unemployed and help them meet their basic needs.

Social Protection Policies Cambodia

According to Asian Development Bank (2020), Cambodia has implemented several social protection policies to address the country's high poverty rates and income inequalities. Below are some examples of social protection policies.

1. ID Poor: This is a national program that identifies households living in poverty and provides them with cash transfers and other forms of support. The program uses a targeting system based on a poverty scorecard to identify eligible households.
2. Health Equity Fund (HEF): The HEF provides free healthcare services to poor and vulnerable people who cannot afford to pay for healthcare. The program covers the cost of medical treatment, transportation, and other related expenses.
3. Social Pension: The Social Pension program provides a monthly pension to elderly people who are 70 years or older and do not have any means of support. The pension is intended to help them meet their basic needs and improve their standard of living.
4. Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT): The CCT program provides cash transfers to poor households with children who attend school regularly and receive basic healthcare services. The program is designed to encourage families to invest in their children's education and health.
5. Public Works: The Public Works program provides temporary employment opportunities to poor households. The program aims to provide income support and improve access to basic infrastructure, such as roads and irrigation systems.

Social Protection Policies Indonesia

Indonesia has implemented several social protection policies to address various social issues, including poverty, healthcare, education, and social security (world bank 2022). Some of the key social protection policies in Indonesia include

1. Healthcare: services for all Indonesian citizens. It is a mandatory program that covers basic health services, including medical consultations, hospitalization, and medications.
2. National Health Insurance (JKN): The JKN program aims to provide access to healthcare services for all Indonesian citizens. It is a mandatory program that covers basic health services, including medical consultations, hospitalization, and medications.
3. Cash Transfer (PKH): The PKH program provides cash transfers to poor households who meet certain conditions, such as ensuring their children.
4. Social Assistance: Indonesia provides social assistance to vulnerable populations, such as the elderly, persons with disabilities, and victims of natural disasters. This assistance includes food assistance, cash transfers, and housing subsidies.
5. Social Security Programs: Indonesia has various social security programs, including the National Pension Program, the Work Accident Insurance Program, and the Death Insurance Program. These programs aim to provide financial protection to workers and their families in the event of accidents, disabilities, or death.
6. Educational Assistance: Indonesia provides education assistance to disadvantaged students, including scholarships and fee waivers.

Overall Indonesia has made significant efforts to implement social protection policies to address various social issues. However, there are still challenges in ensuring that these policies reach all those in need, particularly those living in remote areas or informal workers who may not have access to formal social protection programs.

Social Protection Policies Lao PDR

According to World Bank (2021), Lao PDR, or Laos, has implemented several social protection policies to address poverty, healthcare, education, and other social issues. Some of the key social protection policies in Laos include.

1. National Social Security Law: This law was enacted in 2013 and aims to provide social protection to all citizens of Laos. It includes provisions for social security funds, insurance, and assistance programs for vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, persons with disabilities, and children.
2. Health Equity Funds (HEFs): HEFs are a form of health insurance that covers the cost of healthcare services for the poor and vulnerable populations. The program is supported by the government and external donors and aims to increase access to healthcare services for those who cannot afford them.
3. Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs): Laos has implemented CCT programs that provide cash transfers to households that meet certain conditions, such as ensuring their children attend school and receive regular health check-ups.
4. Education Assistance: Laos provides education assistance to disadvantaged students, including scholarships, school fee waivers, and transportation allowances.
5. Community-Driven Development (CDD): The CDD approach empowers communities to identify their own development priorities and manage funds to support those priorities. It is aimed at improving access to basic services, such as healthcare and education, in rural and remote areas.

Overall, Laos has made significant efforts to implement social protection policies to address various social issues. However, there are still challenges in ensuring that these policies reach all those in need, particularly those living in remote areas or informal workers who may not have access to formal social protection programs.

Social Protection Policies Malaysia

According to the world bank (2021), Malaysia has implemented several social protection policies to address poverty, healthcare, education, and other social issues. Some of the key social protection policies in Malaysia include National Health Insurance Scheme: This program provides free health insurance coverage to low-income households and individuals who are registered with the government's healthcare assistance program.

1. **National Poverty Reduction Strategy:** Malaysia's National Poverty Reduction Strategy aims to address poverty through various initiatives, including social protection programs, job creation, and education and skills training.
2. **Social Assistance:** Malaysia provides social assistance to vulnerable populations, including the elderly, persons with disabilities, and children from low-income families. This assistance includes cash transfers, food assistance, and housing subsidies.
3. **Social Security Programs:** Malaysia has various social security programs, including the Employees Provident Fund, the Social Security Organization, and the Employment Insurance System. These programs provide financial protection to workers and their families in the event of job loss, accidents, disabilities, or death.
4. **Education Assistance:** Malaysia provides education assistance to disadvantaged students, including scholarships, financial assistance, and school fee waivers.

All in all, Malaysia implemented policies focusing on social protection and has good impact but there is always scope for improvement. Malaysia has many challenges for effective implementation and to reach to every individual unto the last citizen of the country who might have very less opportunity and access to avail the social protection programs.

Social Programs and their Categories

Social protection programs in ASEAN member states can be classified into social insurance programs, social assistance programs, and or labour market programs, the following table has classified the important social protection programs into different categories as follows.

Table 6 Social Insurance, Social Assistance and Labour Market programs

Items	Social Insurance	Social assistance	Labour market Programs
Categories	Programs focus on risks like illness, old age problems, and unemployability problems, the programs help to eradicate poverty directly or indirectly	Transfer of money directly into accounts to help marginalized communities, especially the poor	Labour programs help to secure individual employability
Programe	Examples of such programs are health insurance, unemployability insurance, disability insurance, maternity benefits programs, provident funds	Examples of such programs are cash or in-kind transfers, child welfare, health insurance, tax-funded benefits, disability benefits	Training and skill development programs,

The table was developed after analyzing the different social protection policies in ASEAN member States.

Conclusion

Multidimensional poverty is a complex issue that affects a significant proportion of the population in the ASEAN Member States. The study on Multidimensional Poverty and Social Protection Policies in the ASEAN Member States provides a comprehensive analysis of poverty and social protection policies in the region. The study highlights the importance of a multidimensional approach to poverty reduction, which considers not only income but also other dimensions such as health, education, and living standards.

The study finds that poverty reduction policies in the ASEAN Member States have been successful in reducing poverty levels in the region according to ASEAN Secretariat's Statistical Yearbook 2020. However, the study also identifies significant gaps in social protection policies, particularly in the areas of healthcare and education. This suggests that more needs to be done to ensure that vulnerable populations have access to basic services. One of the key findings of the study is the importance of social protection policies in reducing poverty levels. The study highlights the need for a comprehensive social protection system that includes cash transfers, social insurance, and social assistance. The study also emphasizes the importance of targeting social protection policies to those who need it the most, such as children, the elderly, and people with disabilities. The study provides a comparative analysis of poverty and social protection policies in ASEAN Member States, which allows policymakers to learn from each other's experiences. The study finds that countries that have implemented comprehensive social protection policies, such as Thailand and Vietnam, have successfully reduced poverty levels according to ASEAN Secretariat's Statistical Yearbook, (2020).

In conclusion, the study on Multidimensional Poverty and Social Protection Policies in ASEAN Member States provides valuable insights into poverty and social protection policies in the region. The study highlights the importance of a multidimensional approach to poverty reduction, the need for a comprehensive social protection system, and the importance of targeting social protection policies for vulnerable populations. The findings of the study can help policymakers in ASEAN Member States develop more effective poverty reduction and social protection policies, which will ultimately improve the lives of millions of people in the region.

The present study suggests for future research on the aspects like political and cultural dimensions in formulating and implementing the social protection programmes in ASEAN member states. It was also found that there is a dearth of data availability per person spending on social protection which could paint the picture with different brushes.

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