

Socially Vulnerable Groups and Inclusive Policies of Covid-19 Outbreak Handling: Perspective Review of Social Changes

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of Covid-19 pandemic in all countries around the world causes extraordinary social changes in various aspects of people's lives, from health, economy, politic, to culture. When the President announced the first case of Covid-19 in Indonesia in March 2020, what implied was optimism that the virus would not spread in Indonesia, so that it was not followed up with policies that showed preparedness. In fact, what happened was confusion in handling Covid-19 in basic aspects. Indonesia had not put its responses to the pandemic in a more humanist and inclusive policy framework. Many of them still relied on economic logics. As a result, multiple vulnerable groups and new vulnerable groups emerged. The purpose of the writing of this article is to examine: 1) the characteristics of the Covid-19 pandemic disaster, which makes double-vulnerable groups and even has the potential to create new vulnerable groups, 2) Indonesian Government policies in handling these vulnerabilities, and 3) some reflections on inclusive policies in dealing with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia. This type of research is descriptive research with literature study methods. From this research, it is hoped that it can encourage the government to make transformative policies that are oriented towards social justice in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic.

Keywords: *Socially Vulnerable Groups; Inclusive Policies; Covid-19*

1. INTRODUCTION

Currently, a global catastrophe comes suddenly, and no one predicts in advance, but it can cause a crisis in the world community. The Covid-19 outbreak is a form of danger that has the potential to threaten all aspects of people's lives, such as social, economic, health, and psychological. This outbreak has spread to 188 countries with details of 52.4 million people being confirmed positive, 36.7 million people being cured and 1.29 million people dying. (Source: kompas.com on November 12, 2020). In Indonesia, to date there are 463,007 confirmed positive people, 388,094 people have recovered and 15,148 people have died [38].

Government policies in response to a crisis situation cannot be taken carelessly. The dynamics of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis is very fast and requires daily assessment, given the catastrophic character of this outbreak. In addition to causing real social vulnerabilities, this crisis also easily triggers tensions and conflicts, both between communities in government and at the community level. Therefore, the government must

be able to make policies that can reduce potential conflicts due to crisis situations [28]. However, after the President announced a positive case last March, what emerged was optimism that the virus would not spread in Indonesia, so there were no policies that showed preparedness after the announcement. What happened was confusion in dealing with Covid-19 [25]. The lack of preparedness that occurs is shown from the most basic aspects such as unclear referral hospitals, unavailability of test kits, lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) for health, and various problems related to treatment. The same is true at the level of government and policy coordination. It seems that each government agency and leadership has taken its own steps, and there have been several times of miscommunication among policy makers.

Meanwhile, responses based on economic logic are very easily tucked away in narratives that tend to group people into simple categories but can cause problems. This was reflected, for example, in a statement by the government spokesman for the handling of Covid-19, at the end of March: "...the rich protect the poor so they can

live decently, and the poor protect the rich from spreading the disease. disease" [2].

This article tries to explain that the implementation of inclusive pro-vulnerable group policies is a necessity and even an obligation in a pandemic situation. To explain this argument, this paper is divided into three parts: 1) analysing the characteristics of the Covid-19 pandemic disaster which can create multiple vulnerable groups and even the potential to create new vulnerable groups, 2) analyse Indonesian state policies. The government in dealing with these vulnerabilities and 3) some reflections on what inclusive policies need to be taken in dealing with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia.

2. METHOD

This type of research is descriptive research, which can reveal various social and natural phenomena in people's lives specifically. The aim is to examine the status of human groups, a subject, a condition, a system of thought, or events in the present so that they can present a complete picture of social settings such as exploring and clarifying a social phenomenon or reality. It was done by describing a number of variables with respect to the problem and the unit under study between the phenomena being tested. The method used is literature study.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Characteristics of Pandemic Disaster

The development of a civilization that is too exploitative and expansive will certainly cause a significant rift in the relationship between nature and humans [12]. Growth that relies on overdevelopment will also create an environmental crisis and in turn lead to new disasters, including disease outbreaks. The development of science and technology cannot automatically guarantee the success of disaster risk mitigation. The trend of disaster data presented by Coppola [9]. Shows that from time to time the number of disasters that occur is increasing and the number of people affected is also increasing. On the other hand, the occurrence of disasters including a pandemic also seems to be more expensive because the economic impact that will occur is even greater. In fact, the burden that must be borne by those who are affected is not the same because the data also shows how the bad effects of disasters are suffered more by those who are poor [9].

Danger and vulnerabilities tend to be higher because of several specific disaster characteristics. First, the social relations of modern humans make the impact of a pandemic easily spread so that vulnerability will increase, especially if accompanied by partial treatment. Second, handling the impact of a pandemic must follow the development phase of the virus or bacteria, so that

disease transmission has an uncertain critical period and can be fast but can be very long. [35] states that a response to pandemic needs to be carried out as soon as possible after the crisis period begins, when human-to-human transmission occurs, until the peak of disease transmission is passed. The problem is, besides the peak of disease outbreak transmission can occur at different times in each country, the risk of a second wave also haunts before vaccines or treatments are found.

Based on the previous crisis conditions due to disasters, it is usually exacerbated by the government or parties in power that tend to prioritize political, reputational, or economic considerations rather than considerations based on knowledge and humanity [23]. In Indonesia, in particular, if there are populist leaders who are considered unable to properly handle the impact of Covid-19 because of unclear expectations or in other words "optimism bias" which leads to underestimation in the early days of the crisis phase, "hesitating leadership" as a result of not being able to sort and manage extraordinary "information", and taking an approach that tends to be "anti-science" because it prioritizes political and economic calculations [22], of course, will lead to disappointment of various parties.

3.2. Double-Vulnerable Groups

The combination of crisis conditions that are completely uncertain makes those who have been marginalized so far feel more marginalized during the pandemic because they have to bear the double vulnerability due to marginalization that has been experienced so far, as well as the bad effects of the pandemic itself. How can a pandemic create multiple vulnerabilities? A study of the readiness of racial and ethnic minorities in the US to face the influenza pandemic, for example, shows how exclusion results in socio-economic inequality, cultural barriers such as low literacy rates and language barriers, and unequal access to health services makes these groups have no necessary capacity to deal with the bad effects of a pandemic [14]. According to RCCE (2020), they are a group of people who usually bear disproportionate risks in health emergencies, such as the elderly, women and children, disabilities, racial, ethnic and religious minorities, including indigenous peoples, women, gender minority groups, as well as undocumented immigrants and refugees.

a. The elderly, in Indonesia, are a group experiencing marginalization and therefore have a high vulnerability even before the pandemic occurs. The Central Bureau of Statistics [5] recorded that Indonesia has actually started to become an aging society with an elderly population that keeps increasing year by year. Of the approximately 25 million elderlies in Indonesia in 2019, around 65% of them have disabilities and 1 of 4 elderlies are

currently sick [6]. In Indonesia 1 of 2 elderlies still have to work and 84% of them work in informal sector with an average income of Rp. 1,560,000. When a pandemic occurs, these elderly people are not only among those who are threatened with poverty, but also among those who cannot easily access information and health services so that they are threatened with not being able to protect themselves. In fact, these are the ones who usually have comorbidities, so that the elderly is more at risk of Covid-19.

- b. Women and children. Komnas Perempuan's (National Commission for Women) annual records state that, during 2019, there were at least 406,178 cases of violence against women, of which 71% were domestic or personal violence (KDRT / RP) which consisted of physical, sexual, psychological, to economic violence [19]. Meanwhile, regarding children, the recapitulation of data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) shows that from 2011 - 2018, there were 10,186 complaints related to children facing the law, 5,618 cases related to family and parenting, and 1,956 cases related to child trafficking and exploitation [17].

During the pandemic, the risk of violence against women and children is reported increases because "stay-at-home" or "work-from-home" policies have "forced" them to share homes with abusers for long periods of time. Not only vulnerable to domestic violence, online learning at home makes children more free to spend time surfing in cyberspace so that they are more vulnerable to become victims of online social exploitation.

- c. People with disabilities. Inter-Census Population Data (SUPAS, 2015) shows that 8.6% (21.8 million) of Indonesia's population are people with disabilities, and nearly half of them have multiple disabilities (Tempo.co, 2019). In the pre-pandemic period, many people with disabilities were isolated from their social environment due to stigma, and faced discrimination in accessing health services, education or employment sources. According to the Centre for Advocacy for Women with Disabilities and Children (Spade), the pandemic has made people with disabilities more vulnerable due to several reasons, such as "the absence of policies that can ensure access to health services and insurance, the lack of social security, as well as the lack of information about the Covid-19 outbreak and its prevention that consider the access for people with disabilities" [34].

3.3. New Vulnerable Groups

Besides the marginalized groups with multiple vulnerabilities above, the changes in the social and economic situation that happen during the COVID-19

pandemic have created relatively new marginalized groups, including:

First: the groups that vulnerable to getting below the poverty limit, as well as the group of the poor who get worse when facing "a crisis within a crisis". In Indonesia, the number of poor people has ever declined although not significantly. However, BPS records also show the existence of groups that are at risk of falling into poverty, which amounts to "... around 20% of the population who are above the Temporary Poverty Line" (BPS, 2019). This data indicates that "stay-at-home" and lockdown policies can increase the number of poor people, especially those who work in the informal sector.

Second: workers in the informal sector. The informal sector covers a wide range of activities, from the production of "underground" goods and services, street vendors, to small businesses that are formally supported in various industrial fields, including construction, clothing, toys to shoes (Beneria et al., 2014). Based on BPS data (2018), the percentage of formal workers in Indonesia in 2018 reached 43.1%, which means that more than 56.9% of workers in Indonesia work in the informal sector. The relatively large number of workers in the informal sector indicates how many workers may lose their income during the Covid-19 pandemic. Or at least there will be a significant decrease in income. They are vulnerable not only in the economy, but also in other aspects of life, such as access to health, housing, food, clean water, education, etc.

Third: those who do not have access to the internet and technology. Internet access allows users to obtain information on how to protect themselves in accordance with recommendations from health authorities, online education, and other information. Certainly, internet adoption is closely related to the availability of technology and other factors, such as the level of education and income of users, the development of information technology infrastructure, the availability of relevant content, and various other cultural and structural factors (Internet Society, 2019: 24). Based on World Bank record, there were 39.9% internet users in Indonesia in 2018. In provincial level, in the same year, the highest percentage of villages that did not have cellular phone signal were in Papua, i.e. 60.25%, West Papua, as much as 41.25%, and West Sulawesi, as much as 21.38% [7]

The identification of marginalized groups above allows us to predict how the Covid-19 pandemic can cause an increase in the number of vulnerable groups as well as the intensity of their marginalization and vulnerability which is possibly occur [13]. In addition, understanding the processes of marginalization and intersectional exclusion helps us to pay attention to how the interaction of various social and cultural categories at different levels can produce various forms of power relations that are full of inequality [32]. The social and

cultural categories can relate to issues of ethnicity, gender, class, disabilities, etc. that shape or influence each other. Therefore, it is not enough to only find out who has been excluded, how the exclusion process happens, and why they were excluded, but also what can be done to ensure social inclusion [37].

3.4. Government Policies on Handling Vulnerability

Based on the explanation above, vulnerable groups will be the most affected by the pandemic. Therefore, it is necessary to support Covid-19 policies from various parties, especially the government. Since it was announced last March, it is necessary to study whether these policies are really intended to deal with the problems of vulnerable groups or are inclusive. Social inclusion is an activity to build social relationships and respect individuals and communities in it so that all participate fully in decision-making in economic, social, political and cultural life, and have access and control over resources to meet needs.

The policies and strategic steps that have been implemented also tend to be reactive, and are more oriented towards economic stability, rather than humanity. Approaches that are not based on the value of inclusion and are not oriented towards humanity make existing policies insensitive in understanding the vulnerability problems that arise as the result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The social assistance program is only to maintain people's purchasing power so that economic growth does not decline too much during the pandemic, but fails to explicitly explain about how the process of its distribution to marginalized groups affected by Covid-19 is.

The recommendation to "stay-at-home" and "work-from-home" and lockdowns is necessary to lower the transmission curve, and it also has different implications for different groups in society. This policy may be easier for residents who have sufficient savings, regular income, and have the means to work from home, but it is hard for residents who do not have such privileges. They are the ones who have become even more marginalized during the outbreak because they are excluded not only from material resources, but also from opportunities, choices, and life opportunities that enable them to live properly and with dignity [30].

4. CONCLUSION

The following are things that need to be considered so that the handling of Covid-19 in Indonesia can protect marginal groups who experience double vulnerability, as well as mitigate the potential for deeper and wider social marginalization and exclusion in Indonesia, namely in the short term it is necessary to have a pandemic handling policy that benefits all people, inclusive participation to

solve exclusion problems, and inclusive services to solve exclusion problems. Then in the long term, namely through transformative policies that are oriented towards social justice, strengthening civil society movements so that they can become partners, in anticipating and overcoming the impact of similar crises in the future, reflecting on what is essential for human survival, and mitigating the climate crisis to minimize the potential for a pandemic in the future.

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