

Overcoming the threat of poverty and social welfare amid the COVID-19 pandemic through sustainable funding sources

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Abstract

The COVID-19 outbreak is believed to have slowed economic acceleration in several countries, including Indonesia. Dramatic economic changes affect the country's performance in overcoming poverty and unemployment. This article aims to analyze the social and economic impact of the pandemic. It can be seen that the government, as the holder of the mandate of power, still and will continue to rely on social protection programs in dealing with the social and economic impacts that are currently being faced. The government can expand social security and assistance programs by strengthening collaboration between local authorities and non-state institutions. In addition to social protection, Indonesia, known as a country with a Muslim majority, has a religious instrument called zakat, which is believed to overcome the spike in poverty. Moreover, zakat is also considered a potential instrument to support some countries in achieving SDG goals as long as they are appropriately managed.

Keywords: COVID-19, Poverty, SDGs, Zakat

JEL Classification: F62, H12, I32, I38, Q01

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 disrupted the world economy's development; the intense turmoil caused by this pandemic forced many developing countries to postpone some of their economic acceleration programs in Indonesia. The World Bank (2019) stated that economic growth in developing countries is projected to slow from 6.3% in 2018 to 5.8% in 2019, followed by a slight decline of 5.7% and 5.6% in 2020 and 2021, respectively. With normal conditions, economic projections in developing countries continue to decline yearly, and now with the deadly virus threat, Indonesia inevitably has to prepare for this financial disaster.

The severity of the coronavirus has been able to paralyze various state activities. The crisis has caused various social and economic upheavals (Lawton et al., 2020; Nicola et al., 2020), from regional to global. Furthermore, the pandemic ultimately killed the economic cycle, resulting in temporary and even permanent layoffs as the worst conditions (Carlsson-Szlezak et al., 2020). As a result, those who lose their income source fall into a cycle of poverty (Whitehead et al., 2021). Amid this global

anxiety, a unique view is expressed by McGowan (2020), who views the corona pandemic as a form of examination to test a country's economic resilience and social structure. Therefore, handling a pandemic will depend on the government's social policies through comprehensive and in-depth studies involving various disciplines to produce sharper perspectives and more diverse solutions.

Providing protection and welfare to citizens is an obligation for the government of a country. Žofčínová (2017) argued that social welfare services provide a standard of living for individuals in stressful social situations who cannot handle them independently. Meanwhile, Sinayi and Rasti-Barzoki (2018) explained that every government must eventually move towards the sustainability phase if it wants to survive amid disruption. Joint global programs have been designed to realize prosperity together in the future; the program is the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a continuation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) program. Amid the program's progress, which is quite good, the world is currently hit by the COVID-19 virus, which has paralyzed all socio-economic aspects. The world still has to strive to realize the SDGs Program, which is targeted to be achieved by 2030, but on the other hand, the world is also expected to recover soon from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The economic downturn due to COVID-19 cannot be avoided by Indonesia; this emergency then affects the country's structure. Therefore, the authors are interested in discussing Indonesia's socio-economic capacity in dealing with this deadly virus and whether this pandemic threatens the development agenda and creates new poverty. This condition is undoubtedly a big challenge for a country as big as Indonesia. It wants to raise its dignity in the world's eyes by realizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially poverty alleviation, by 2030. The subject of the discussion will be divided into two parts to answer this big question. First, the Corona pandemic's impact spread on economic activities and employment, thus creating new poverty threats. Furthermore, the Second is the Solutions for Social Welfare in dealing with the COVID-19 epidemic in Indonesia to realize the SDGs program.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach emphasizing the study of literature (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Many secondary data were collected from various sources from the internet in the form of books, journals, reports, news, and so on. Scientific journals published in the three years are the primary reference. The primary documents analyzed are related to COVID-19 and its development in the world and Indonesia. The references used in this study are up-to-date, most of which were published from 2020 to 2022. Most of the data were taken from Google Scholar, emphasizing some keywords: COVID-19; Poverty; SDGs; Zakat, and the selected data must be in English. More details can be seen in Figure 1.

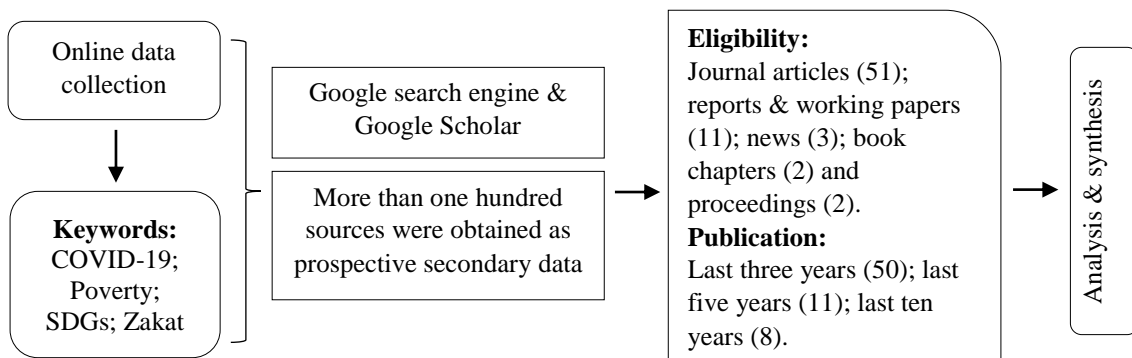


Figure 1. The flow of data collection and analysis

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Zero poverty x new poverty

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were born at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in 2012. The objective was to produce a set of universal goals that meet our world's urgent environmental, social, and economic challenges. The SDGs replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which started a global effort in 2000 to tackle poverty's indignity. All United Nations Member States adopted these global goals in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity in 2030. Thus, at this point, we know that SDGs represent a significant advance over the MDGs (Stewart, 2015) and are more ambitious (Jacob, 2017).

Amid many countries' enthusiasm to achieve the SDGs, a stumbling block lies before the gate. The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated and paralyzed the economic sector and created a new threat of poverty, especially in developing countries (Buheji et al., 2020), including Indonesia, with a substantial human population and a reasonably complex poverty problem. Indonesia has experienced positive progress in achieving several indicators contained in the SDGs (Hudaei et al., 2020; Rassanjani et al., 2019). However, after the COVID-19 pandemic hit that archipelago country, many problems emerged, especially in the socio-economic sector (Olivia et al., 2020). The number of poor people has increased during the pandemic, from the percentage of poverty 9,22 percent in September 2019 to 9,78 percent in March 2020, and will remain till the end of 2020 (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2020b; Suryahadi et al., 2020). The pandemic then impacted the progress of achieving the SDGs, and the previously well-designed programs targeted to be realized in 2030 will experience enormous obstacles.

The SDGs program will be increasingly difficult to achieve, especially in 2030, due to the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic that plague the world, especially in placing the first goal in the SDGs, namely "end poverty in all its forms everywhere". Before the world met COVID-19, several countries were off track from their hopes of ending poverty in the next decade, and this is due to projections showing that 6% of the global population will still live in extreme poverty by 2030 (Editorial, 2020). Meanwhile, the threat of global economic recession after the pandemic is suspected to be the primary motivation for why millions of people will return to poverty (Valensisi, 2020).

Indonesia is one of the highest countries with confirmed COVID-19 cases in the ASEAN (Abdullah et al., 2021); this will undoubtedly be a projection of the failure to achieve the SDGs target in 2030. The increase in COVID-19 is undoubtedly affected by the rise in poor and vulnerable groups. The cases expected will be more severe than that in the global financial crisis in 2008. International commodity prices fell, and all income groups experienced a decline in welfare. Ministry of National Development Planning projected that without social protection, the decline in welfare would be varied from 8,6 % to 8,1 % from poor to the richest, respectively, creating poverty (Rudiyanto, 2020). By looking into the effect of COVID-19, it can be said that without the threat of a pandemic, creating a world without poverty would be extraordinary because of the complexity of the problems that continue to develop from time to time. Moreover, disruption due to COVID-19 is undoubtedly much more complicated to handle with an ordinary strategy. However, realizing zero poverty is still possible but quite challenging.

Unemployment and informal sector

The widespread and rapid spread of the coronavirus caused the government to react by limiting people's mobility and interaction. All activities that made people gather were taboo, so factories and offices were closed, schools were closed, many businesses did not open, and other outdoor activities were abandoned. On the one hand, maintaining this distance has saved lives (Newbold et al., 2020), as seen in the decreasing trend of new cases of infected communities (Wong et al., 2020). Nevertheless, on the other hand, these preventive regulations have suspended the economy (Al-Mansour & Al-Ajmi, 2020); thus, millions lost their jobs and became victims of layoffs (von Wachter, 2020). Finally, the wave of layoffs has become a worrying specter apart from COVID-19.

The problem of unemployment is acute in developing countries (Alper, 2018; Sithole & Buchana, 2021; Suci & Ramdanyah, 2019), especially in Indonesia, which has long considered this as one of the main concerns, and now it is added to the pandemic conditions that follow to add the problems to the labor economy system in this country. The government's anticipatory measures to combat the COVID-19 outbreak by limiting activities outside the home have caused many breadwinners to lose their jobs. Just as many capital owners are forced to activate the layoff option due to stagnant economic activity, reduced profits, and income have resulted in their inability to provide salaries to employees. According to Goshu et al. (2020), contraction in sales and income from the business sector and negative growth in household income and expenditure has resulted in various economic consequences, including massive job losses that impact the population's welfare.

Chodorow-Reich & Coglianesi (2021) project that about 1.6 million workers laid off due to COVID-19 by April 2020 will remain unemployed for at least six months. The length of time someone is laid off from work also depends on the pandemic's length (Goshu et al., 2020). However, it does not rule out some workers experiencing permanent layoffs due to companies failing to anticipate the significant impact caused by the pandemic. Here we can assess that in addition to the company's ability to manage exit strategies against the pandemic's impact, the community, including workers, plays a role in the conditions they feel. Heeding government calls to stay home could reduce the virus's spread, although no one can guarantee how long the pandemic will last.

During 2015-2019, Indonesia's open unemployment rate fell from 6.18% to 5.28% (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2019); unfortunately, this percentage increased to 7.07% in 2020 (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2020a). The increasing number of unemployed is indicated by the pressure experienced by various business sectors. The COVID-19 pandemic has interrupted operational schedules, so workers have to be laid off. Apart from layoffs, the increasing number of unemployed was also contributed by several informal sector workers who also lost their income. The number of informal workers is large, reaching 80% of the total population, especially in developing countries (Narula, 2020).

Moreover, these informal sector workers are a group that is very vulnerable to the negative economic consequences of the pandemic caused by the related lockdown policy (Bassier et al., 2021; Rassanjani et al., 2022); unfortunately, this group often receives less government support than those working in the formal sector (Webb et al., 2020). Indonesia is a country that has a proportion of people whose jobs are mainly in the informal sector compared to formal jobs; Badan Pusat Statistik (2020a) noted that the number of informal workers reached 60.47% in August 2020. Pitoyo et al. (2020)

stated that COVID-19 could shock informal workers in Indonesia because the pandemic can affect their work mobility, ultimately affecting their income. The increase in Indonesia's unemployment rate could have a tremendous impact on economic development in the future. It is not easy for a country to quickly recover its economic condition coupled with a high unemployment rate.

If not handled properly, increased unemployment will create many bad possibilities for the victims. Hiswåls et al. (2017) revealed that job loss affects victims' social life and consumption patterns due to changes in financial situations; they even feel isolated, lose self-esteem, and feel hopeless, ultimately affecting their physical health. Furthermore, Blustein et al. (2020) saw the increase in global unemployment due to COVID-19 creating deep sadness and trauma for those laid off. Hence, the layoffs resulting from this pandemic present grim existential challenges for the country and its residents (Goshu et al., 2020). Meanwhile, the worst result of the inappropriate handling of this social problem is that it has resulted in a spike in poverty that is difficult to control. The bad news is that COVID-19 may be the first cause of increasing global poverty since 1998. Using thousands of scenarios, Jafino et al. (2020) estimate that 32 million to 132 million people will fall into extreme poverty by 2030 due to climate change; the results of this forecast also match available estimates for an increase in global poverty due to COVID-19.

With the absence of employment and increasing poverty, hunger becomes a more significant multidimensional problem. Poverty and hunger are closely related because hunger arises from poverty (Otegunrin et al., 2019). One of the poverty alleviation programs is designed to provide food to eliminate hunger (Sakanko & David, 2018). Then, the aftermath of prolonged hunger, if not handled properly, can lead to a more serious problem, namely anarchism or crime. Previous research has observed that poverty and crime are interrelated. Papaioannou (2017) considers that income shocks lead to widespread poverty, becoming the main cause of crime. However, Iyer and Topalova (2014) state that absolute poverty is associated with a higher crime rate than relative poverty, which is also confirmed by Marxists, who see absolute deprivation as the root of crime (Kim et al., 2020). Thus, the duration of a pandemic will affect the potential for crimes that arise, but it must be remembered that crime will be the last resort if there is no other way to make ends meet. Therefore, for this lousy intention to be easily stopped, government roles, efforts, and policies are needed, which are expected to create a climate conducive to life amid this prolonged pandemic.

The threat of poverty and social welfare

Indonesia has long struggled with welfare issues. Sure enough, the long efforts taken to reduce poverty have been tested, as the COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to give birth to a new number of poor people. It was indicated that 26.2 million people lived below the poverty before COVID-19 (Gibson & Olivia, 2020). A pandemic is predicted to put 5.5 and 8 million Indonesians into poverty (R. Ali & Tiwari, 2020). Without COVID-19, the shadow of poverty is relatively high. Given the economic recession that is certain to occur, it cannot be imagined how steep the long road is to bring down that astonishing number.

Power et al. (2020) state that millions of households were already impoverished before the pandemic. Millions more could follow unless the government protects household income by making policy adjustments. That way, the government will be

visible to the public, despite delays in determining policy direction. Long before COVID-19 hit and destroyed social resilience, the government had directed social protection policies as an instrument of poverty alleviation. Social protection systems have emerged as an additional policy tool to address poverty and hunger in developing countries in the last 20 years (Hidrobo et al., 2018). Social protection has become one of the most popular government policies for overcoming poverty (Rassanjani et al., 2019). Thus, social protection policies have a significant role in realizing equal distribution of social security for all parties, namely by reducing poverty and inequality and promoting inclusive growth by increasing human resources productivity and the structural transformation of the national economy.

In its report, the World Bank (2020) stated that around 106 countries had introduced social protection programs in response to the COVID-19 outbreak; this number increased by 26% (previously only 84 countries). From that figure, most governments still rely on social protection as a solution policy in addressing the vast impact caused by COVID-19. The Indonesian government has responded to the pandemic by allocating budgets through National Economic Recovery Program (PEN). Regarding social and economic responses, this program mainly focuses on social protection, followed by business incentives, corporate financing, and sectoral and regional government finance allocation (Sparrow et al., 2020). Therefore, focusing on a national economic recovery policy would minimize the number of vulnerable groups.

As the largest share of recovery packages, social protection is expected to assist the current poor people groups and prevent vulnerable individuals from falling into poverty due to covid attacks. However, even though the proportion of social protection is the largest, it should be underlined that the amount of budget allocation is still far from ideal (Sparrow et al., 2020). Sieber et al. (2022) argued that realizing social protection is a relatively easy problem for countries with large GDP per capita. However, on the other hand, social protection schemes are burdensome for countries with low GDP. Their GDP has decreased due to slowing economic activity during the pandemic. The same thing has also been explained earlier by Harris (2013) that an effective social protection system has long been seen as a problematic luxury to reach by many developing and low-income countries.

Another challenge of social protection distribution is the need for targeted and designed databases. The research showed that Indonesian social protection is designed for pre-COVID-19 cases only. The study has shown that the social protection program needs a targeted design because it was only designed against poverty before the pandemic. It focuses on poor people in the countryside and does not manage urban households, as the majority are impacted by the pandemic (Sparrow et al., 2020). Within the complexity of social protection allocation, it is understandable. The government has too many things to consider in budgeting its revenue for handling COVID-19, such as providing better health facilities, social protection for affected communities, etc. Given the many needs that must be resolved and the high budget required, a sustainable funding source outside of state revenue is needed, even outside loans or foreign debt.

As a country with one of the world's largest populations, and a majority Muslim population, Indonesia is quite fortunate. A rule has become a long tradition in efforts to improve social welfare for underprivileged people through zakat collection. This instrument is a religious obligation for all Muslims with minimum wealth to help those

in need. Zakat has a social protection function by targeting people vulnerable to the risk of poverty (Razak, 2020; Tajmazinani & Mahdavi Mazinani, 2021). The advantage of zakat is that it has a solid foundation of funding sources (Shaikh, 2016). Therefore, based on its goals and benefits, zakat is believed to have a sustainable source of funds to be an alternative source of funding for poverty alleviation and development programs (Miah, 2019). Even if it can be managed optimally, zakat will be able to have an impact on poverty alleviation so that it supports the achievement of the SDGs (Riyaldi et al., 2020). Thus, zakat seems to have the same vision as the SDGs, especially Goal 1, which is related to poverty alleviation.

As a country with the largest Muslim population, Indonesia has enormous potential in zakat. Several studies on the potential of zakat have been carried out, one of which is by Asfarina et al. (2019), which stated that Indonesia's Zakat potential is worth more than IDR 200 trillion. Furthermore, the results of a study from a non-structural government institution that manages zakat nationally called BAZNAS also received a similar value, namely above IDR 200 trillion or around USD 17 billion (Pusat Kajian Strategis BAZNAS, 2020). By that potential, the mission of poverty alleviation and economic equity will be more easily realized by remembering all the dynamics and obstacles blocking the road. Thus, it depends on the government to build a strong collaboration with outsiders such as religious organizations, as required in the SDGs 'Goal 17 Partnerships for the Goal' that building partnership is pivotal in promoting sustainable development.

The complexity of COVID-19 as a new threat in this fast-paced era requires more attention in public administration studies, particularly public policy, and collaborative governance needs to be done to create a fast and appropriate policy (Huang, 2020). Several government policy packages to restore uncertain economic conditions to prevent the emergence of new poor groups must be pursued even in emergencies. Gerard et al. (2020) argued that developing countries could provide a broad range of social protection if they use a more comprehensive range of patchwork solutions than high-income countries. This strategy could include expanding the social security system, expanding existing social assistance programs, and engaging local governments and non-state agencies. Optimizing zakat as a sustainable source of funds is one of the patchwork strategies in question, and several countries have practiced this initiation during COVID-19. In Morocco, for example, the acceleration of Zakat payments is carried out to help those affected by the pandemic (Ezziti, 2020).

Meanwhile, zakat is an effective short-term emergency system in Bangladesh that has succeeded in reducing the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable communities (Alam, 2020). Hudaefi & Beik (2021) found that the Zakat collection during the pandemic in Indonesia has shown an increase. It is extraordinary, considering that the desire to do good and help others remains the main thing amid high anxiety. Amid the country's inability to recover from disasters, the vulnerability of the pandemic, closely related to poverty, can be overcome with zakat. Therefore, improving the distribution of wealth and providing insurance by optimizing Zakat funds needs to be the government's attention to minimize losses and increase resilience due to COVID-19, which is difficult to understand when it will end.

Without COVID-19, some governments have experienced obstacles in realizing the SDGs, especially in alleviating poverty, so it cannot be imagined how steep the long road to making it happen is, given the economic recession that is certain to occur. Apart

from the negative impact of COVID-19, which is considered by most people to have disrupted development, it turns out that, on the other hand, there are still groups who see the current situation as a transformative moment or opportunity that can change the world (Davies, 2020; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Mair, 2020). Furthermore, many things will improve, such as economic development that will become more sustainable (Gössling et al., 2021; Kozul-Wright & Barbosa, 2020). Hopefully, COVID-19 will pass soon, and what humans aspire to live sustainably can be realized.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

The COVID-19 outbreak brings a new challenge for all countries worldwide, particularly for less developed countries. With the scenario preventing the spread, the Indonesian government faces disputes in performing economic activities and dealing with employment issues. Mobility restrictions during the pandemic had impacted an economic slowdown and increased layoffs; thus, poverty cannot be prevented. The increasing number of poor and vulnerable groups due to COVID-19 is more complicated within the complexity of the poverty problem beforehand. Moreover, the condition worsens because most Indonesian citizens are informal workers. Undeniably, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) development agenda by 2030 is challenging.

Recommendation

Social protection is one of the tools that could help address social issues; however, it should be underlined that a nation with low-level income per capita should consider the level of money that can cover all the costs of protection. Unlikely countries with advanced economies, third-world countries should carry out social protection cautiously. The nation could be enlarging social security and social assistance programs and strengthening collaboration between local authorities and non-state agencies. Apart from social protection, Indonesia also has to optimize zakat. As a majority of the Muslim population, zakat as a religious instrument is incredibly funded to support the government in assisting those who needed. Managing zakat properly will be an excellent tool for complementary social needs for poor and vulnerable groups.

This study only uses secondary data as an object of analysis. Hopefully, there will be further research with more robust methods through collecting empirical data from the field to cover the deficiencies in this paper.

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