



COVID-19 Outbreak and Social Class in Indonesia

By

Mohammad Hasan Ansori

Director for Program and Research at The Habibie Center
ansori@habibiecenter.or.id

Introduction

The world is currently being beset by extraordinary anxiety and turmoil as a result of the emergence of a major disaster that is the COVID-19 virus outbreak. More than 200 countries are thought to have been affected by this virus. As a system, globalization has made the world become a “small village”, where all corners are more connected and increasingly borderless, which in turn makes the transportation and movement of goods and people between nations and continents become easier and faster.¹ Globalization has played an important role in facilitating the pandemic status of the COVID-19 virus. Aside from that, other strategic factors specifically refer to advances in transportation technology which help in the ease and speed of human mobility between nations and continents.² There has never been in the history of human civilization, a type of virus that has spread so fast and so aggressively to all corners of the world in a period of more or less four months since the first case emerged in Wuhan city, Hubei province in China at the end of November 2019.

Indonesia has now become one of the countries in the world that have been exposed to the COVID-19 virus. Since the first time the virus was detected on 2 March 2020 and directly announced by President Joko Widodo, the number of cases of the virus has shown that at least until now, the increase has been very significant and constantly at a rate of around 100 cases per day. The curve in the number of COVID-19 cases has also not shown any indications of decreasing. Several sources, both domestic and international, have predicted that the number of COVID-19 cases in Indonesia will reach tens (10,000s) or even hundreds of thousand cases (100,000s). The capacity, speed, and effectiveness of the Indonesian Government’s response, which has been characterized as poor and slow, combined with decision-making that has been seen as uncertain, is thought to be responsible for the high number of



aforementioned cases.

Social Class Analysis

Each disaster, including this COVID-19 virus outbreak, provides an opportunity to conduct studies from various aspects and scientific disciplines, as well as to provide alternative policy solutions that are mutually complement and supportive in handling the aforementioned virus outbreak in Indonesia. In the area of social science, various aspects of the social structures and processes as well as social organizations can become its own study and policy options. Max Weber, one of the founders of social science, has already provided a strong base or interesting analytical framework to observe the COVID-19 virus outbreak disaster from the aspect of structured inequalities regarding class, status, and power.³

Liechty (2003) asserted that class analysis towards a social phenomenon always falls on one of the approaches, namely between structural-determinism (given) or cultural-constructivism (processual). Weber himself has provided a framework for class analysis that is regularly used as a reference, by dividing class into three parts, namely lower class, middle class and upper class that is drawn proportionally in the form of a triangular curve.⁴ Structural class categorization in general refers to the differences in personal income or wealth.⁵ As a developing country, the social-economic structure of the Indonesian population is still dominated by the lower class. The Indonesian Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati asserted that the size of the middle class population in Indonesia reached 60 million people in 2019 and has increased to 85 million people this year.⁶ In terms of theory, if we refer to the social class triangular curve, the size of the lower class is almost twice the size of the aforementioned figure. Indeed, according to the World Bank (202), the composition and proportion by class in Indonesia is made up of lower class (79%), middle class (20%) and upper class (1%).⁷

The COVID-19 virus can infect any person regardless of social class, ethnic group and/or religion. However, the lower class make up the most vulnerable and at-risk group. Sooner or later, if it is not handled adequately and efficiently, the virus will massively affect the Indonesian lower class which forms the majority. It should be noted that the lower class are most vulnerable due to lack of access to adequate social protections. The lower class will also feel the greatest impact in addition to being the largest population such as is the case in other developing countries. This condition could be extended if we also consider the post-disaster trauma. However, so far there has not been any data available that illustrates the socio-economic variables of patients infected with the COVID-19 virus. The official data from DKI Jakarta, as the province that has the highest number of positive COVID-19 cases with almost





50% more cases than other provinces, only records the variables of gender and age of each patient.⁸ The Government needs to know such data in order to identify what assistance can be distributed and to whom such assistance should be distributed as part of reducing the economic burden of certain classes in this pandemic situation.

Aside from that, disaster mitigation policies for the COVID-19 disaster in Indonesia in the form of territorial quarantines (*karantina wilayah*) and large-scale social distancing (*Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar*) that tightly limit public movements as well as appeals to stay at home and work from home except for essential needs such as economic, have hit hard and massively impacted the economic situation of the lower class, especially those that work in the informal sector and/or work on a day-to-day basis. In this matter, 'stay home' policies can have a different meaning and consequence for each class. For the lower class, staying home can mean they cannot secure the food they need to survive.

Conclusion

As such, the Government must quickly and responsively provide priority food security policies for the lower class. Special budgetary allocations are needed to protect the lives of the lower class. This includes policies to provide food assistance, relief from various household expenses – especially electricity and water bills – easier health access, as well as affordable basic needs. If these are not implemented promptly, in a matter of days, there will be many among the lower class that will fall under extreme poverty.





Endnotes

- 1 Mohammad Hasan Ansori, "Consumerism and the emergence of new middle class in globalizing Indonesia", *Exploration: Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, The University of Hawaii, vol. 9, spring 2009. Diakses dari <https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/bitstream/10125/10713/1/UHM.Explorations.2009.v9.Ansori.Indonesia-Middleclass.pdf>
- 2 Quarantelli, 1998
- 3 See: Robert A Stalling, Weberian political sociology and sociological disaster studies, "Sociological forum", vol. 17, no. 2, Juni 2002. Lihat juga Henry W. Sischer III, The sociology of disaster: definitions, research questions, and measurements in post –September 11, 2000, environment,. Paper submitted for presentation at the annual meetings of the American Sociological Association, Atlanta, August 2003
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 <https://www.kompasiana.com/andrynatawijaya/5c5e71beaeebe15a9b24ad14/masyarakat-kelas-menengah-dalam-kisaran-ekonomi?page=all>
- 6 <https://katadata.co.id/berita/2019/01/23/85-juta-penduduk-kelas-menengah-di-2020-peluang-bagi-industri-kreatif>
- 7 <https://databoks.katadata.co.id/datapublish/2020/02/04/masyarakat-menuju-kelas-menengah-kelompok-terbesar-penduduk-indonesia>
- 8 See: <https://corona.jakarta.go.id/id/data>





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Contact:

The Habibie Center

Jl. Kemang Selatan No. 98, Jakarta 12560

Tel: +62 21 781 7211 | Fax: +62 21 781 7212

Email: thc@habibiecenter.or.id

Website: www.habibiecenter.or.id