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1. ARE SDGs IN THE DOLDRUMS DUE TO COVID – 19? - *Media Online The Jakarta Post*

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Are SDGs in the doldrums due to COVID-19?

A short answer to this question is yes, but it is obvious and predictable failure was visible for some time. This debate started before 2015, the year in which the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted as successors to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agreed in 2000. The eight MDGs were expanded to 17 massive goals and 169 targets.

Using projections from international organizations such as the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the World Health Organization, the British Overseas Development Institute (ODI) already quantified in 2015 how much the world would need to accelerate current trends to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

The targets were given a "grade", based on the expected progress. An "A" rating meant that current progress is sufficient to meet the target, "B", "C", "D" and "E" numbers need to go up a notch. An "F" number indicates that the world is going in the wrong direction.

None of the 17 SDGs was rated A. Only three SDGs – SDG1 (no poverty), SDG8 (economic growth and decent jobs) and SDG15 (biodiversity) – were rated B. SDG 3 (health for all), 4 (quality education), 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), 17 (partnerships for the goals), 2 (no hunger), 6 (water and sanitation), 7 (energy), 5 (gender) and 9 (industrialization) all received an average C grade. SDGs 10 (inequality), 11 (cities), 12 (waste), 13 (climate change) and 14 (oceans) were all unsatisfactory.

In other words, only three of the 17 SDGs were on track to achieve a reasonably acceptable outcome by 2030. This score was developed in 2015, long before COVID-19 hit.

With the devastating effect of COVID-19 on nearly every sector of the global economy, it is clear

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that achieving the SDGs by 2030 is virtually impossible. Moreover, addressing development goals by nation states is more difficult than was recognized by the authors of the 2030 Agenda for Development.

For example, a study by Lin and Monga (2017) concluded that between 1950 and 2008, only 28 countries managed to reduce their gap with the United States by 10 percent or more. That is a period of 58 years, while the 2030 agenda must be realized within 15 years. Of the 28 countries listed by Lin and Monga, only 12 were non-European or non-oil economies.

According to Lin and Monga, the challenge of renewing developing countries' economies is inseparable from some of the intellectual and policy errors imposed by the Washington Consensus in the 1970s to 1990s, the years described as the lost decade for developing countries.

Banerjee and Duflo (2019), who shared the 2019 Nobel Prize in economics for their work on poverty alleviation, in fact emphasized how economists designing development policies are out of touch with the realities of ordinary people.

In a more recent analysis, published in the authoritative *World Development*, Moyer and Hedden (2020) also question how feasible the SDGs are under the current circumstances. They highlight difficulties for some SDG indicators (access to safe sanitation, high school completion, and underweight children) that will not be resolved without a significant shift in domestic and international aid policies and prioritization.

In our view, the realization of the 2030 agenda can only be achieved

on the basis of three factors.

First is financing. The critical question that is posed in various forums about the SDGs invariably ends with the question: who is going to fund it? Where will the money come from? How can low- and middle-income countries generate sufficient resources to finance the 2030 development agenda.

Although each country has its own priorities, paying the bills for the SDGs remains a delicate matter. The Asia-Europe Foundation calculated (2020: 6) that "the total investment costs to achieve the SDGs by 2030 are between US\$5 trillion and \$7 trillion per year at the global level and between a total of \$3.3-4.5 trillion per year in developing countries.

This implies an average investment need of \$2.5 trillion per year in developing countries. To better understand the real financial needs of the SDGs, these countries should prepare their own estimates, at least for their priority objectives".

A significant effort must be made through the private sector and philanthropists. While governments and ordinary people have been hit hard by the health and economic impact of COVID-19, in a way it has been good news for billionaires, many of whom have seen their wealth grow astronomically.

Second is political will. Many countries have drawn up ambitious national development plans that look great on paper. How many of those plans end up being realized?

When one sees that the fortunes of a country have been successfully changed through the effective implementation of national plans, one cannot separate such achieve-

ments from the strong political will of the leaders. The example of China speaks for itself.

Third is the need for robust communication for development and social change, so that political will can be conveyed to all stakeholders. Leaders who inspire change do so with the communication tools available in their time.

While the digital age disrupts social systems and drives transformation at a scale and pace unparalleled in history, the SDGs remain quite silent on the subject. Indeed, today digital technologies determine what we read and consume, how we vote and how we interact with each other and the world around us.

Many risks and uncertainties are emerging, including threats to individual rights, social justice and democracy, all amplified by "the digital divide" – the differential speed of internet penetration and access to digital technologies around the world.

None of the SDGs can be achieved unless people are able to communicate their dreams, concerns and needs – locally, nationally, regionally, globally. We therefore propose to supplement the list with SDG 18: Communication for all.

Communications for social change in the era of COVID-19 must also consider the challenge of misinformation when initiating communication strategies. Therefore, the communication strategies of the World Bank, UNICEF or WHO are not comprehensive enough.

First, they failed to take into account the challenges of infodemics and fake news in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, the strategies contain little scientific communication to make the public aware of how health professionals make decisions and advise the public about its safety.

Disinformation is a critical factor that exacerbates the challenges that communication for development and social change must address.