

The 2020 Annual Conference Indonesian Association for Public Administration (IAPA) \ “Strengthening Governance Capacity and Public Administration amidst Pandemic and New Normal Era” 11 November 2020

Tippawan Lorsuwannarat*

Professor Agus Pramusinto, President of Indonesian Association for Public Administration, Honorary Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my privilege to receive an invitation from Professor Agus Pramusinto to be a plenary speaker in the Annual Conference IAPA 2020. The theme of the conference is **Strengthening Governance Capacity and Public Administration Amidst** COVID situation in Asia. Then some critical factors relevant to this pandemic will be presented.

The human history has experienced many kinds of pandemic before, but no pandemic has had such a serious impact on the global economy as COVID-19. The present situation of COVID is varied across the country. The EndCoronavirus (ECV) website classifies the countries into three groups: winning, nearly there, and need to take action. Ten countries in Asia are successful in beating COVID-19, ten countries are nearby there, and twenty-three countries need to take action.

Why is governance capacity of each country different? I would like to present the framework of my talk about collaborative governance amidst pandemic which needs to have further explored.

1) Leading with Scientific Knowledge and Empathy

Leadership of the country is critical during the pandemic crisis because leaders will provide a sense of the direction of the policies, and influence people behavior to manage crisis together. The pandemic situation calls for the decision model which use scientific knowledge and facts in preparing policies and measures to prevent and control pandemic. The closed tie between the heads of state and medicine professionals is an absolute necessity.

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The common characteristics of the female leaders who are successful in dealing with Covid include scientific-based, decisive, and empathy. They dared to tell the facts to the people about Covid, made the decisive policies to lockdown the cities earlier, and put empathy and care into their actions¹. As Dr. Christos Christou cited at the 2020 United Nations Economic and Social Council that “this pandemic has brought suffering to people everywhere, but its impact is not shared equally.”² It is the duty of the leaders to ensure that the vulnerable groups will not be excluded from the public health and safety net programs and they need to get empathy most.

2) Cooperative Community Culture

Cooperative culture is a core value to battle against COVID, however, the protests of anti-restriction measures are still going on in the US and many European countries. The consistent and transparent communication will improve public compliance with protective measures. Thanks to the Asian norm including non-contact greeting. Most of Asian people in general comply and cooperate with the pandemic prevention measures by wearing masks, washing their hands, and follow other measures.

Additionally, the country leaders can strengthen the cooperative community culture by being the role model to fight against COVID. The beliefs in herd immunity and non-mask wearing which some leaders in western countries buy on these beliefs and have to pay with an expensive price. The leaders need to bring in the belief based on the scientific-based and show the right practices as the role model to protect and control the pandemic. Many evidences in Thailand show that when people awareness and cooperative value is high, any intentional situations that cause the spread out of pandemic would trigger for people anger and call for the government’s response to immediately tackle the problems.

3) Public Policy to Balance Public Health and Economy Aspects

The coronavirus pandemic requires responding government to formulate the policies to balance the public health and economic aspects of the country. The tightened containment measures reduce domestic activities and disrupt trade, tourism, transportation, and services sectors. The government in many countries have adopted fiscal and monetary packages for the poor, SMEs, and businesses affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Under this situation, the right target groups, the right amount of money, the right processes, and the right time are challenges for the responsive government to keep the epidemic under control. However, these are alleviation measures in the short term. In the medium term, the policy makers have to reconsider the economic structure of the country as the global COVID risks grow, how to balance economic internal and external reliance in order to reduce the impact from the pandemic.

The Chinese policy is an example to transform their economy to rely more on domestic demand as foreign trade will decline.³

4) Participatory Governance

In a culturally diverse societies appearing in the globalized world, participatory governance is a collaborative effort of administration to draw contribution from various sectors to solve problems, to engage other sectors to country development, and to share knowledge, technology, and resources through their networks. The government should be ready in open up their boundary to a wide spectrum of stakeholders, and select the right level of public participation for each issue in particular area. By having the suitable role and duties as facilitator and providing the necessary information, the government will enhance the effective participatory governance.

Public and private partnerships are aiding the response to COVID for developing the community capacity in having better decision and in finding innovative answers to mitigate the effects of COVID. When there is a shortage of medical supplies and equipment, many Thai people and businesses have voluntarily donated medical supplies and invented the medical innovations to the hospitals.

However, like some other developing countries, Thailand lacks of medical doctors and staffs comparing with the number of citizens, our one million of village health volunteers across the country serve as guard communities nationwide from COVID-19. As WHO representative in Thailand called these volunteer groups as “unsung heroes” who work to support the prevention, detection, and reporting of COVID-19.”

Another aspect of participatory governance is among the central government and the regional and local governments. Although the centralized decision making in formulating the policy during the pandemic is suitable for the crisis, a more inclusive decision-making at the regional and local governments will improve access to information and efficient policy implementation. Many regional and local cases in Thailand present their constructive policy interpretation, they even have more rapid and innovative implementation.

5) Digital Transformation

COVID, as pandemic disruption, has speed up digital transformation in many sectors because the governments encourage people to work from home during the containment measures. This situation provides an opportunity for new business to emerge, including online food delivery, online commerce, virtual conference, telemedicine, and gaming products⁴. Since the outbreak, 67 percent of surveyed Chinese organizations have found innovation to be critical to their performance, they viewed that innovation is no longer an option, but a necessity.⁵

Schools and universities experience with virtual learning, such as Harvard Business School Online, were better prepared for the change. However, it is reported from Forbes Magazine that the majority of education organizations in the US. Are not really set up for online classes.⁶

In the meantime, the governments transform their operations to electronic processes so that people can access to public services without face to face contact. Across the globe the governments have brought in mobile applications for tracking the infected or suspicious cases. However, an expert from Digital Rights warned that “Without adequate tracking, there is a danger that these new measures will become the norm around the world. Although some may appear entirely legitimate, many pose a risk to citizens’ right to privacy and freedom of expression.”⁷

The challenge is many developing countries still lack the technology infrastructure, e.g. high-speed internet and good signal, and equity in accessing the technology, to offer the capability without some sacrifices. Some group of people still cannot adopt the technology to use government services or electronic learning. Digital divide is still one challenge during the pandemic.

I would like to conclude my speaking that to strengthen the governance capacity is a new chapter of knowledge which still need to be further explored and discussion. I admire great efforts of IAPA is searching the intellectual lights amidst COVID situation through collaborative networks.

Endnotes

¹ Wittenberg-Cox, A. (2020). What do countries with the best coronavirus responses have in common? Women leaders. *Forbes*, Apr 13, 2020.

² <https://www.msf.org/covid-19-has-brought-suffering-all-impact-not-equal>.

³ Yao, K. (2020). *China Pursue Economic Self-reliance as External Risks Grow*, *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-economy-strategy-idUSKCN25031K>.

⁴ Singolda, A. (2020). *Op-Ed: Analysis of 8 Billion Page View Shows Where the Next Hot Start-up can Thrive*. CNBC. May 12, 2020 Retrieved from <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/05/12/here-are-the-new-businesses-to-start-during-the-coronavirus-recession.html>.

⁵ Chinadaily. (2020). *Chinese Companies Accelerated Digital Transformation Post-COVID 19*. 28 Oct. 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202010/28/WS5f9935dba31024ad0ba81ace.html>

⁶ Marr, B. (2020). How the covid-19 pandemic is fast-tracking digital transformation in companies. *Forbes*. Mar 17, 2020.

⁷ Hamilton, I.A. (2020). Authorities everywhere are using smartphones to track the coronavirus, and it’s part of a massive increase in global. *Business Insider*. Apr 14, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.com/countries-tracking-citizens-phones-coronavirus-2020-3>.