COMPARATIVE LOCAL GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO COVID-19 IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES: CASE IN GAMBIA AND INDONESIA

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Abstract

This study aims to evaluate the performance of two different local governments in two different nations using decentralization and policy implementation theories. It will also provide a general overview of the situation in these two nations at the time when Covid-19 began to spread. Using a Comparative Case Study (CCS), this study compares local government response to Covid-19 in Gambia and Indonesia. In this study, the pandemic Covid-19 was given the same effect in each country but produced different results depending on government activities in each country. When the first Covid-19 cases appear in their countries, Gambia and Indonesia face a similar problem, and they also have a similar strategy for dealing with this pandemic outbreak. The Gambian government provides food, personal protective equipment (PPE), and essential sanitary items, as have several local governments in Indonesia. Gambia and Indonesia also establish a task force (both central and local government) to control virus spread, which becomes a key action in both countries' management of the Covid-19 outbreak. This research find that the role of local government in translating policy from the central government becomes critical to a region's success. A country's central government must not only maintain good performance in areas where it already excels, but also provide education and strong attention to local governments that are still struggling in order for them to improve their performance.

Keywords: Covid-19, local government, Gambia, Indonesia, decentralization

INTRODUCTION

SARSCoV2 virus surfaced in Wuhan, China, at the end of 2019. Following then, the virus evolved into a plague known as Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid-19) which has swiftly spread throughout several countries (Gotham et al., 2021). The socioeconomic consequences of viral illnesses have been immense since the rapid emergence of Covid-19 and the repercussions are still emerging (Hoe et al., 2021; Mogaji et al., 2022). The plagues/diseases surely have varying effects on each country, based on the countries policy-making strategies (Debnath & Bardhan, 2020; Gotham et al., 2021; Welman et al., 2021). Government actions are thought to have a significant impact on pandemic prevention and transmission in each country (Sundararaman, 2020; Gin et al., 2021; Kusumasari et al., 2022). Every level of government play an important role to decrease the spread of Covid-19 in their country (Ingram et al., 2021; Nerenberg, 2021). The Central Government develops policies as a roadmap for dealing with Covid-19 and regional governments implement these policies into activities to limit the number of spreads in their particular territories. Good communication between governments is required to achieve the successful suppression of Covid-19 (Gin et al., 2021; Owen et al., 2020; Siu et al., 2020).

However, every government in each country has a different response when dealing with covid-19. This statement proven by the data from WHO (https://covid19.who.int/table) that shows significant differences in the number of virus spread in every countries. As previously stated, this is due to the various government responses in each country. This article then aims to compare the performance of two governments in two different nations, including the performance of local governments when dealing with COVID-19. Local government has an important role in the crisis situation like pandemic and give a different impact in each area (especially in different nations), depend on their regulation and activity (Dariagan et al., 2021; Hatab et al., 2021; Nerenberg, 2021). This article hopefully will give a big impact to the study of local government because there has not been much research comparing the performance of local government in two different countries when facing pandemic like Covid-19. In this study, researcher will analyse the performance of two different local governments in two different countries using policy implementation and decentralization theories, and will give an overview about the condition in these two countries when Covid-19 started to overspread.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Policy Implementation

Public administration, organizational theory, public management research, and political science studies all intersect with implementation studies. In the broadest sense, they can be described as policy change studies (Prasetyo et al., 2022; Surjana, 2018). Implementations are synonymous with transactions. Implementers must constantly deal with tasks, environments, clients, and each other in order to carry out a program (Ali et al., 2020; Kunguma et al., 2021). Organizational formalities and administrative mechanics are important as

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background, but the key to success is constantly dealing with context, personalities, alliances, and events. It also crucial to such adaptation is a willingness to admit and correct mistakes, change course, and learn by doing (Surjana, 2018). Nothing is more important to implementation than self-correction, and nothing is more dangerous than blind preservation (Sahabu et al., 2018; Tachjan, 2006). According to Mazmanian and Sabiter (1983), there are several factors that give an impact in implementation process, such as; 1) factor affecting the tractability of the problem, 2) non statutory variable affecting implementation, and 3) the ability of the statute to structure implementation. Regulation and implementers interpretation is an important aspect in policy implementation, because weak statutory or bad interpretation will give a bad impact in implementation process (Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1983).

In achieving the effectiveness of public policy, the path that connects policy and policy performance is separated by several interrelated factors, namely (Sahabu et al., 2018):

- The policy purpose
- The sources of policy
- The characteristics of the implementing agency/agency
- Communication between related organizations and implementation activities
- The attitude of the implementing apparatus

The theory of public policy implementation departs from an argument that differences in the implementation process are always influenced by the nature of the policies implemented, so some of the above aspects are important to consider in each process. The success of a policy implementation can be seen from the extent to which these activities solve problems or meet community needs, therefore community involvement is also an important part that must be considered in the process of implementing public policies (Peteru et al., 2021; Prajitha et al., 2021).

Decentralization in times of pandemic

Decentralization is a multifaceted and complex concept. Different types of decentralization exhibit distinct characteristics, policy implications, and success conditions (Armando et al., 2020; Quang-Huy, 2020). Decentralization can take the form of political, administrative, fiscal, or market decentralization (Boissière et al., 2013; Bolshakov et al., 2021; Mamma, 2016; Wakarmamu & Indrayono, 2019). Government transfers authority when they establish public businesses or corporations, they typically give these entities a lot of latitude in making decisions (Busch & Amarjargal, 2020; Fatemi & Behmanesh, 2012). The process by which managers give their subordinates the power to decide and take action in specific circumstances is known as delegation of authority (Charity, 2012). The act of conferring a specific authority by a higher authority is known as delegation (Busch & Amarjargal, 2020; Charity, 2012; Noory et al., 2020). If authority is transferred, the subordinate is now accountable to the superior for completing the task but the superior is still in charge of doing so, especially in decision making process (Charity, 2012).

Delegation of authority can speed up and streamline government operations,

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especially when dealing with issues like pandemics (Colella et al., 2021; Papadaki et al., 2021). The pandemic necessitates quick and responsive government response, so the involvement of local governments as government representatives closest to the community is critical in determining the success of a country's pandemic response (Ingram et al., 2021; Nerenberg, 2021). When dealing with the pandemic, the ability of local governments to interpret central government policies is also critical to the success of implementing government activities in the regions (Nerenberg, 2021; Rocha et al., 2021; Ruwanpura et al., 2021). The central government will usually make policies in the midst of a pandemic as the basis for implementing pandemic handling in the regions, but the interpretation is often different in each region even within the same country (Coelho et al., 2020; Ingram et al., 2021; Papadaki et al., 2021).

METHOD

This study compares the local government action when facing Covid-19 in Gambia and Indonesia using Comparative Case Study (CCS; Słomka-Gołebiowska & Urbanek, 2020; van den Hurk et al., 2016). CCS was used to compare numerous examples that had similar results but different effects, or several cases that had similar effects but different outcomes (Fauzi & Kusumasari, 2020). Using the CCS approach, similar data was selected according to a predetermined standard and methodically obtained to establish a structured data collection; the data collection results were then subjected to a focused comparison process (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017; Goodrick, 2014). Unlike traditional case study methodology, CCS is regarded as a method capable of increasing data findings by comparing multiple previous examples, as well as interpreting every step up to the conclusions acquired from each case (Fauzi & Kusumasari, 2020; van den Hurk et al., 2016). The CCS approach was utilized to compare general and specific sources from the individual countries. The data came from country reports, policy documents, policy reviews, or constitutional amendments, government websites, past research that included expert judgments, and even the direct interview with expertise (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017; Fauzi & Kusumasari, 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Case in Gambia

The West Coast Region of The Gambia by virtue of its geographical location and being the most rapidly urbanizing Local Government Area in the country is the most vulnerable region in term of the control and prevention of the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. The region accounts for about for 37% of the country's population (Gambia Bureau of Statistic, 2013). As the COVID-19 pandemic swept the world, Local Governments in the country stepped up to help as a result of their unique position to shape, adapt and deliver a holistic response to the epidemic. This paper outlines and showcases some of the many Local and Regional Government responses to the COVID-19 crisis in The Gambia. Much of Local Government's responses focused on mitigating the impacts of state policies that imposed lockdowns or public emergency regulations that halted many aspects of daily life and business activities. These restrictions affected vulnerable and excluded groups first and worst. Lockdowns, curfews and other emergency

restrictions were often imposed hurriedly, with little preparation and mostly with no consultation with Local Governments, and consequently had unforeseen impacts.

The Emergency support schemes launched by states were often inadequate given the scale of the need, or failed to reach key vulnerable and excluded groups, while existing social safety nets could not hope to meet the sudden increase in demand as many people found themselves unable to pay for essentials. Local Governments in the country stepped forward to meet these needs, providing food, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and essential sanitary items, offering financial aid and filling gaps in the provision of healthcare and psychological support in collaboration with key stakeholders. Local governments are uniquely positioned to shape, adapt and deliver a holistic response to epidemics and therefore, the rationale for local governments' involvement in the COVID-19 response is grounded in the overall logic of decentralized government. Like around the globe, Local governments in the Gambia, are leading the COVID-19 responses. Essentially, an effective local action is important to slow the spread of the virus. This paper will focus on the measures undertaken by Local Government and its key stakeholders in the West Coast Region, The Gambia in relation to the prevention and containment measures, maintaining an adequate level of basic services while ensuring compliance with restriction measures and enforcement of COVID-19 response protocols. One of the most notable actions undertaken by the Local government during the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic was to undertake immediate decisions in a timely manner,

directed to the right places and the right institutions for effective response. To ensure a well-coordinated approach, a regional Covid-19 task force has been set up in the region with the overall objective preventing the spread of the virus and coordinating Covid-19 responses. These structures were headed by Regional Governors and supported financially by the Local Governments.

Case in Indonesia

Although the local governments in Gambia were facing some problems when the virus began to appear, they finally took a good step in dealing with Covid-19. However, Covid-19 become a fairly complex problem in various countries (Çakar et al., 2021; Kusumasari et al., 2022), not only in Gambia but also in another developing country such as Indonesia. Indonesia facing some problems when the first case appeared and the virus start to overspread. At first, Indonesia had some of difficulties because the spread of virus become out of control and some areas have a limited resources such as medical devices or health workers (Azhar, 2020; Hizbaron et al., 2021; Larkins et al., 2020). The Government of Indonesia then is taking a serious step to reduce the spread of Covid-19 by regulate some provisions in the midst of a pandemic. Several policies such as emergency public activity restrictions (called PPKM), work or study from home, vaccination program, and the establishment of a task force are implemented during Covid-19 pandemic in order to reduce the spread of virus. Along with the regulation development, Indonesia is slowly succeeded in reducing the number of Covid-19 cases.

Indonesia is a democratic country that decentralized some part of government authority to local governments. The establishment of Covid-19 task force is also involving the local governments to control the implementation of regulations in their respective areas. The local governments have a job to report Covid-19 information update in their area that covering number of cases and number of people who have been vaccinated. The success rate in suppressing covid-19 cases then depends on local governments performance, where we can see it from the different cases spread number in every area. The Central Government of Indonesia has a duty to maintain every local governments performance in order to reduce the spread of covid-19. Vaccination acceleration is one of Central Government regulation that considered as a successful policy to reduce the cases of Covid-19 in Indonesia. The central government of Indonesia collaborates with various parties in health sector to accelerate vaccination by delegating technical implementation to each local government. Local government play an important role in this activity, where most of the regions have proven successful in meeting the targets of these activities.

Based on data from the Indonesian Ministry of Health (October, 2022), 98.1% of the population had received the first dose of vaccine and 82.2% had received the second dose of vaccine. In other words, from the target of 208.3 million people, 204.6 million of them have taken the first dose of vaccine. This percentage shows a high number, where most of the success of these activities cannot be separated from the contribution of the local government. Case from Special Region of Yogyakarta (SRY) is one of an example how local government in Indonesia had a good strategy when facing Covid-19 pandemic. The local government in that area had exhibited adaptive governance to the Covid-19 pandemic by providing an open-access spatial and non-spatial data, extensive combined uses of both types of data, and prompt active engagement of communities in the enforcement of new rules and regulations mandated by national and provincial governments (Hizbaron et al., 2021). The local government also give an information to local communities where is vaccination places in their area, so the citizen can have an information where is vaccination places that near from their home. As previously stated, local governments in Indonesia then play an important role in handling COVID-19, both in the control function and the implementation of activities. Unfortunately, not every local governments (in Indonesia also Gambia) is performing a good action when facing Covid-19 Pandemic.

Comparative Analysis

Several regions in eastern Indonesia have faced delays in responding to COVID-19, allowing the virus to proliferate in the area. For instance, Papua, one of Indonesia's eastern provinces that experiencing some Covid-19 epidemic difficulties. It is undeniable that some areas in Papua were not significantly affected by COVID-19 due to difficult access to other areas, but some urban areas were severely affected when the pandemic began to spread in the region. When the delta case initially emerged in Merauke, for example, the local government and task force struggled to halt

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the rapid spread due to limited health services. The Merauke Covid-19 task force is experiencing difficulties due to limited laboratories to improve citizen testing and the provision of additional health facilities which are also limited. In the end, restrictions on access were issued by the governor of Papua from outside the Papua region to Papua and vice versa. This case proves that some local governments are also experiencing difficulties when dealing with Covid-19, so that problem solving is still dependent on higher levels of government.

Furthermore, in Gambia a straightforward effect of COVID-19 on the country is its impact on economic growth. The halt in tourism and the reduction in economic activity resulting from the nationwide and regional State of Public Emergency (SoPE) will adversely affect GDP (Gross Domestic Product) growth. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has revised the 2020

growth projections from 6.3 percent to 2.5 percent assuming recovery 2020. This growth projection is subject to significant downside risks owing to the high level of uncertainty compounded with continued spread of the virus particularly in Africa and the economic consequence of the pandemic on the world economy. Within the context of the containment & prevention measures, a large proportion of the activities to be implemented in this category will be done by government, with support provided by local and international partners. As discussed in the previous section, government has taken steps contain and prevent the spread of the virus by setting up quarantine centres, border patrol/surveillance to prevent or lower the illegal entries and exists, testing suspected cases, communicating to the public about the dangers of covid-19 and passing a bill in parliament for a state of public emergency (SoPE).

Table 1. GDP of Indonesia and Gambia (US$)

Country	2019	2020	2021
Gambia	1813608280	1830413000	2078070684
Indonesia	1119099868265	1058688935455	1186092991320

Source: The World Bank, 2022

However, if we look based on the data in the table above the decline in GDP actually occurred in Indonesia, while Gambia actually increased. It is undeniable that Indonesia's adaptability in the midst of a pandemic was initially difficult and slow. This was due to the shutdown of several economic sectors, which had a negative impact on the economic growth. The large population was also not followed by the fast handling of Covid at the start of its spread, so that the spread of the virus affected production performance in every sectors.

According to the Rapid assessment on Covid-19 in Gambia July, 2020, the two sectors that are expected to be severely affected are the tourism and construction (and real estate) sectors, which account for 5 percent and 25 percent of the current stock of debt respectively. In Indonesia the tourism sector was also heavily affected, where local and international tourists were unable to visit tourist attractions due to regulations in the middle of pandemic. According to Mazmanian and Sabiter (1983), there are three factors that give an

impact in implementation process; 1) factor affecting the tractability of the problem, 2) non statutory variable affecting implementation, and 3) the ability of the statute to structure implementation. Uniquely, in this study, there were similarities in the two cases that occurred in two different countries. In the first part, Indonesia and Gambia faced the same problem, which was the uncontrolled spread of Covid-19 cases at the outbreak's inception. Then, in the second section, there are several non-regulatory variables that affect implementation in both countries, most notably the level of public awareness of the importance of dealing with Covid-19 in their country, which was initially low. Nonetheless, with the development of local governments in several regions across the country (Indonesia and Gambia), public awareness can be raised to maintain health protocols in the midst of a pandemic and suppress the spread of Covid-19. In the third section, similarities occur where the central government in the two countries initially found it difficult to determine the appropriate regulations in dealing with Covid-19, but with the development of regulations such as the acceleration of vaccines and also the improvement of health protocols, they were successfully formulated and implemented well in several regions.

There are also similarities in the two countries in this study if we refer to the five aspects in Shabu et al (2019) writings. Both have policy goals of reducing Covid-19 spread and exploring policy bases based on Covid-19 cases in their respective countries. The characteristics of the implementing agency differ in the two cases, with the regional government in

Gambia emphasizing logistical assistance and the regional government in Indonesia emphasizing the acceleration of the Covid-19 vaccine. The vertical communication pattern is also effective in several areas of the two countries, including this case on West Coast (Gambia) and Yogyakarta (Indonesia). The condition of the apparatus implementing activities in the two regions can also be said to be conducive, because they try to serve the community and remind them to maintain health protocols and increase immunity through activities such as vaccinations.

CONCLUSION

Covid-19 was given a same effect in every country but give various outcomes depending on government activities in each country. Gambia and Indonesia have a similar problem when the Covid-19 first cases appear in their country, but also have a similar strategy to solve this pandemic outbreak. Local government in Gambia provides food, personal protective equipment (PPE) and essential sanitary items, which several local governments in Indonesia (including Yogyakarta) also did it. Gambia and Indonesia also establish a task force (both in central and local government) to control the spread of virus and become one of the key actions in managing Covid-19 outbreak in both countries. However, some of local government is also struggling when facing this pandemic. The role of local government in translating policy from the central government becomes a key to the success of a region. However, there are several differences between Indonesia and Gambia in handling Covid-19. The Central government in a country not only have to maintain a good performance in some area

that already succeed, but also give education and strong attention to the local government that still struggling, so they can improve their performance in managing Covid-19 outbreak or other similar cases appear.

Even though the responses and strategies used were similar, the economic impact in this two countries was totally different. Indonesia is an archipelagic country with a large of population, Covid-19 experienced a greater negative impact than the Gambia. This can also be proven from the low GDP growth for the last three years (2019-2022) in Indonesia, where Gambia has actually increased. An enormously populous nation like Indonesia must quickly adapt to problems in order to minimize their effects. The limitations of comparisons between developing nations with varying population sizes and geographic conditions are then examined in this study. Then, future research can compare how two nations with comparable geographic conditions and populations handle crises.

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