



Original Article

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Sustainable Development in Southeast Asia

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Abstract: COVID-19 is spreading worldwide and has been declared by the United Nations a global pandemic. The author is curious about how ASEAN member states responded to different policies based on their domestic socioeconomic, security, and political circumstances. The crisis caused by COVID-19 has affected research in various ways, as SDGs are concerned. SDGs are ruined by complex and turbulent problems in three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental. This paper aims to discuss how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted SDG's achievement and investigate the role of governance for public administration in combating COVID-19 in Southeast Asia. The method used is a qualitative research method through analytical literature reviews. The pandemic has been found to severely threaten the achievement of the SDGs, while opportunities concerning selected SDGs can also be found. The results reveal that massive vaccination is needed for cooperative regional sustainable development and recovery strategies, such as the green economy. The findings provide practical guidance on policy implications to transform regional sustainability and push innovative strategies to achieve sustainable development agendas. ASEAN's government policymakers have built a sustainable strategy for combating pandemics based on the epidemiology of COVID-19.

Keywords: sustainable development goals; COVID-19 pandemic; innovative strategy; southeast Asia.



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1. Introduction

At the Munich Security Conference held on February 15, 2020, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said, "We are not just fighting an epidemic, but we are fighting an endemic too." Finally, on March 11, 2020, WHO declared Coronavirus Disease 2019's (COVID-19) a global pandemic (Ullah et al., 2021). Therefore, Ullah et al. (2021) said that the only way to stop spreading the virus is through social distancing and self-isolation. This practice has required a potent combination of e-governance, innovative use of existing and advanced technologies, and a strong community. Many places in the world are affected by COVID-19's presence and transmission (Bherwani et al.,

2021), including Southeast Asia, which is geographically and economically close to China, where COVID-19 first emerged (Wai et al., 2021). According to Suriyankietkaew & Nimsai (2021), as of May 15, 2021, the World Health Organization reported an astonishing increase in numbers of more than 160 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 infection worldwide more than three million deaths.

For the first time since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, the global average SDGs Index score for 2020 has decreased from the previous year: a decline driven to a large extent on the economic part by increased poverty rates and unemployment following the outbreak of the COVID 19 pandemic, so the pandemic has impacted all three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental (Suehrer, 2021). The pandemic has not only affected health but also socioeconomic and environmental impacts globally, regionally and domestically. The COVID-19 pandemic has become a global catastrophe and a development challenge for all countries. Additionally, its impacts have affected our progress toward the United Nations SDGs (UN SDGs) in 2030. The COVID-19 pandemic impacts, challenges, and opportunities are how we can recover from the pandemic of the UN SDGs in Southeast Asia. The impact of COVID-19 on the Association of South-East Asia Nations (ASEAN) has directly affected its economy. As ASEAN comprises diverse cultures, socioeconomic backgrounds and geographical differences, steps taken are based on what is deemed important and applicable to each country (Fauzi & Paiman, 2020). COVID-19 continues to grow in certain areas, causing anxiety and destruction. With all these causes, effects, and restoration plans, SDGs will still suffer in great order to attain their target by 2030, and collaborative support from all countries can only help in this time (Nundy et al., 2021).

ASEAN is composed of 10 countries. The ASEAN is the seventh-largest world economic superpower and the third in Asia, with a combined GDP of US\$2.6 (Fauzi & Paiman, 2020). ASEAN member states have responded to it with different policies based on their domestic socioeconomic, security, and political circumstances. Singapore, the Philippines, and Malaysia are the countries with the highest cases of COVID-19 implementing a lockdown policy. Thailand and Indonesia apply a local lockdown policy. While Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia and Laos implement social distancing policies to protect their citizens from COVID-19 (Arnakim & Kibtiah, 2021; Phandanouvong et al., 2021). Brunei Darussalam has leveraged its small population to operationalize effective incident management, surveillance, testing, risk communication (Wong, Koh, et al., 2020) and contact tracing strategy (Wong, Chaw, et al., 2020). Myanmar's government adopted a 'Containment-at-source' strategy, mandating all confirmed cases to receive treatment in government health facilities, aggressively quarantined contacts and implemented localized lockdowns (Wai et al., 2021).

Generating financial support to finance and advance the 17 UN SDGs is now even more important because the economy is badly impacted by COVID-19 (Kim et al., 2021). In the face of the social, economic, environmental and political disruption caused by turbulent problems, it is not enough for the public sector to activate a predefined emergency management plan and call in the bureaucratic troops to deal with the crisis. Turbulent problems call for cross-boundary collaboration, public innovation, and, perhaps most importantly, the development of robust governance strategies that facilitate and support adaptive exploration and exploitation of emerging options of opportunities (Ansell et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the strengths and weaknesses of a public sector under stress. The pandemic has shown that well-functioning public administration and effective governance frameworks are preconditions to responding appropriately to a pandemic of this magnitude. However, other factors also play a role, such as public trust in government. On the positive side, the fear of many that COVID-19 crisis management would push sustainable development from the political agendas. It remains a challenge to include the SDGs in all core government's functions: to scrutinize implementation of the SDGs nationally, to integrate them in planning, strategies, legislation, mindset and in the budget (Meuleman, 2021). Empirical research on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on sustainable development in developing countries and emerging economies in a regional context, such as Southeast Asia, is scarce (Suriyankietkaew & Nimsai, 2021).

Most ASEAN countries have already internalized the SDGs in their planning development (Dariah et al., 2020). COVID-19, as a pandemic, is impacting institutions around the world. Its scope and economic dimensions also pose a major threat to achieving the United Nations SDGs (Leal Filho et al., 2020). Most previous research works have focused only on a specific subject area such as health, education and tourism or considered just one dimension of sustainability, such as economics, social or environmental, in the light of the COVID-19 outbreak (Ranjbari et al., 2021). This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the COVID-19 implications for sustainability. Then, the extent of the COVID-19 pandemic impacts all three dimensions of sustainable development achievement in a good and bad way and responds to possible innovative strategies for a recovery toward policy implications that governments of Southeast Asia have taken. Finally, we hope to advance the inadequate understanding of the COVID-19 effects on the sustainability pillars' economic, social, and environmental aspects. This paper contributes to promoting the existing literature and offers benefits for stakeholders toward sustainable futures. This paper aims to comprehensively discuss the COVID-19 implications for the sustainability of how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted SDGs achievement and governance of public administration's innovative strategies in Southeast Asian countries' planning development.

2. Literature Review

2.1. How the COVID-19 Pandemic has Impacted SDGs Achievement

The rapidity with which COVID-19 spread worldwide left governments with little time to respond (Anderson et al., 2020). The COVID-19 crisis and related measures are far-reaching and affect all ASEAN countries. The impacts are exacerbating economic problems and intensifying social issues, especially poverty and inequality (Suriyankietkaew & Nimsai, 2021). Since September 2015, 193 member states of the United Nations (UN) have adopted the 2030 agenda. The agenda contains a global goal called Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), comprising 17 goals and 169 targets. The UN 2030 agenda aims to eradicate poverty, reduce inequality, decouple economic growth and environmental degradation, and deal with climate change and its impacts, to create a better world for future generations (Suriyankietkaew & Nimsai, 2021). The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) shared this aspiration and mainstreamed the 2030 agenda into the ASEAN Community Vision 2025. To implement both the 2030 Agenda and the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, UN- ESCAP, in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand and the Secretariat of ASEAN, produced a document: "Complementarities between the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Framework for Action" (Suriyankietkaew & Nimsai, 2021).

2.2. Public Administration's Innovative Strategies in Combating COVID-19 to Achieve SDGs

Understanding the basis of COVID-19 from healthcare perspectives would provide a fundamental understanding of how the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries deal with and overcome the spread of the disease. As COVID-19 has shown to be in multiple forms of generations, the crucial aspect of mitigation efforts from past histories across borders would help researchers, medical practitioners and policymakers to plan in detail on how to control the spread of the virus concerning different forms of COVID-19 genetic variations (Fauzi & Paiman, 2020).

3. Materials and Methods

The method used is a qualitative research method through analytical literature reviews and relies on secondary sources of data collection. Secondary data sources are preexisting data collected or used for a different purpose or by authors other than the researcher (Arnakim & Kibtiah, 2021). The writer assessed relevant published literature, observations, and current global trends of COVID-19 impact SDG's achievement in Southeast Asia. The initial selection of this research and review papers was carried out by applying a structured keyword search. The main keyword of this paper is sustainability, impact, COVID-19 pandemic and Southeast Asia as the context of the research. The combination of the keywords and operators were ("sustainability" OR "sustainable") AND ("COVID- 19" OR "pandemic" OR "Coronavirus" OR "SARS-CoV-2"), limited to the article title, keywords, and abstract in the Scopus databases by Publish or Perish application. The "OR" operator means that the search will contain at least one of the keywords. This keywords selection limited the search scope to that research conducted on sustainability subject areas through the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic lens. Also, to realize the most recent sustainability and sustainable development challenges after COVID-19.

4. Results and Discussion

ASEAN is composed of 10 countries. The ASEAN is the seventh-largest world economic superpower and the third in Asia. Among the ASEAN countries, the ASEAN-5 are the countries that have the strongest GDP growth and are seen as having stronger economic activities (Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Brunei). The impact of COVID-19 on this region has had a direct effect on its economy (Fauzi & Paiman, 2020). As we know, economics is the most important pillar of SDGs. COVID-19 is a global threat to everyone. It is unlikely to have equally severe consequences in all countries and socioeconomic groups within these countries. It is most dangerous to underprivileged individuals, such as those living in poverty, unemployed or in countries with less developed medical infrastructure. The biggest problem is the uncertainty of this pandemic, as a new disease worldwide must have a lot of research to understand the characteristic of the viruses.

Hörisch (2021) reminds us that the pandemic has shifted attention away from the many primary challenges of sustainable development, most prominently climate change and the global "Fridays for Future" movement. Like most pandemics, it is most dangerous to underprivileged individuals, such as individuals living in poverty, unemployed or in countries with less developed medical infrastructure. As a novel virus, its long-term consequences for human health and the long-term implications of a new medication for fighting COVID-19 cannot be predicted with certainty. Fighting COVID-19 thus also becomes a question of risk adversity, such as fighting other sustainability challenges. COVID-19 leads to severe disasters, causing deaths and also putting socio-economic-environment development at risk, COVID-19 poses a direct threat to SDG1 – no poverty (the pandemic is estimated to put roughly half a billion people in poverty, 70 million of these in extreme poverty); SDG2 – zero hunger (The number of people facing acute food shortage is expected to double); SDG3 – good health and well-being (COVID-19 has caused deaths, interfere other disease prevention

programs, people receive inadequate treatment); SDG4 – Quality Education (More than 130 countries closed schools nationwide); SDG5 – gender equality (The pandemic caused an increase in domestic abuse against women); SDG6 – clean water and sanitation; SDG7 – affordable and clean energy (enhancing international cooperation to facilitate access to clean energy research); SDG8 - decent work and economic growth (increase national levels of unemployment); SDG9 – industry, innovation and infrastructure; SDG10 – reduce inequalities (inequalities increasing due to the COVID-19 crisis); SDG11 – sustainable cities and communities; SDG12 - responsible consumption and production; SDG13 – Climate action; and SDG14 – Life below water; SDG15 – life on land; SDG16 – peace, justice and strong institution; and SDG17 - partnerships for the goals (Restrictions to global trade).

But the decision to have lockdowns resulted in significant benefits, improving the quality of air and reducing the level of environmental pollution, as a good signal to SDG3 – good health and well-being; SDG7 – affordable and clean energy; SDG9 – industry, innovation and infrastructure; SDG11 – sustainable cities and communities (Digitalization causes opportunities, for examples: reduction of traffic consequence of work from home, boost the development of smart cities and advancement of public transportation); SDG12 - responsible consumption and production; SDG13 – Climate action (the decrease in greenhouse gas emission as well as in the usage of fossil fuels); SDG14 – Life below water (reduce pollution in the ocean and pressure on threatened species); SDG15 – life on land (allows refuges of endangered species, which are frequently hotspots of tourism); and SDG16 – peace, justice and strong institution (the acceptance of regulation and their intervention is relatively high). Another good news of COVID-19's spread to SDG's achievements is SDG9 – industry, innovation and infrastructure (the digital infrastructure in many countries is developed).

Exit strategies must capitalize upon periods of relative suppression of COVID-19 to ensure that those affected are identified and receive care, with prioritization given to those with the highest clinical need. So often hidden, mental health is a concern as social isolation has increased loneliness, depression, and anxiety (Anderson et al., 2020). For example, China uses an app to monitor people's movement, classifying them according to their health status and travel history (Anderson et al., 2020), and so does Indonesia with Peduli Lindungi Application. The efforts to combat COVID-19 continue to be plagued by fake news, and social media companies must be diligent and act appropriately even when leading figures spread misinformation (Anderson et al., 2020). Few studies that have evaluated the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 have focused on specific sectors such as health care, tourism, mining, or the economy. It is estimated that the economic stagnation caused by COVID-19 will push about a million people into poverty, consequently elevating global poverty for the first time since 1990. Because of this, global leaders are encouraged to commit to an economic recovery initiative that will support high-risk economies and their vulnerable communities (Ekwebelem et al., 2021).

5. Conclusions

A sustainable exit strategy must be based on the epidemiology of COVID-19 but must go beyond it. Implementing social distancing measures has been politically challenging but technically simple. Future planning must include sustainable funding and building resilience to prepare for any potential major future health threats (Anderson et al., 2020). This paper provides a simple, yet critical review of the mitigation efforts undertaken by the ASEAN countries. Being one of the promising regions in the world with a relatively high population, the ability to counter the COVID-19 outbreak serves as the blueprint for pandemic control in most other developing countries worldwide (Fauzi & Paiman, 2020). In the end, the pandemic's role is as an accelerator for achieving the SDG agenda. All the Southeast Asian countries are more concerned with social, economic, environmental and government. Only the COVID-19 can hit all the agendas of 17 SDGs, including SDG1 (no poverty); SDG2 (zero hunger); SDG3 (good health and well-being); SDG4 (quality education); SDG5 (gender equality); SDG6 (clean water and sanitation); SDG7 (affordable and clean energy); SDG8 (decent work and economic growth); SDG9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure); SDG10 (reduced inequalities); SDG11 (sustainable cities and communities); SDG12 (responsible consumption and production); SDG13 (climate action); SDG14 (life below water); SDG15 (life on land); SDG16 (peace, justice and strong institutions); SDG17 (partnerships for the goals) in a good and bad way once time.

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