



**13<sup>th</sup> BALI DEMOCRACY FORUM**  
Nusa Dua, Bali, 10 December 2020

## **KEY ELEMENTS**

### **Background Info:**

Pandemic brings multi crises across the globe and threatens the lives and livelihood of people, drastically shaken public health and economic structures. Political aspects are also not an exception; the pandemic may further put a test on democracy that seemingly already in the retreat.

What are the implications of COVID-19 to Democracy? What are the consequences of the responses to the Pandemic on democracy? Can we sustain democracy post-pandemic? How and in what conditions? What will be the way forward to ensure democracy remains effective to bring prosperity and justice?

These are some of the critical questions need to be answered not only conceptually, but also strategically. As a forum of sharing experiences, dialogues, and building initiatives for democracy supports in Asia-Pacific, the roles of BDF and its pillars are critically relevant. The declining of democracy and the challenges brought by the Pandemic COVID-19, necessitates the profound responses.



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**Ministers Session: Perspectives from the World**

**Current Conditions & Challenges**

Ministers from 11 countries and representatives from 4 international organizations highlighted some related issues on administrating democratic process, while at the same time, creating and enforcing policies to manage Covid-19 pandemic, as follows:

- The measures taken by governments to contain the pandemic are inherently limiting many forms of freedom to some certain levels. These measures are often seen as a contest between individual freedoms versus public health interest. Debates and protests have arisen on whether the primacy of individual rights must be eroded in order to protect the well-being of the whole community.
- On the other hands, the participants also agreed that the pandemic has made so much negative impact to the economies of states, and also to global economy. Related to this impact, some participants, for example the ASEAN Secretary General, believe that democracy is most stable and vibrant when the basic needs such as food, house, and good livelihood are provided and protected. Against this backdrop, some developing and least developed countries are struggling not only to provide healthcare but also to create policies to recover their economies.
- The Forum also highlighted, that the pandemic of COVID-19 has also brought together with it: “the misinfodemic”. The disinformation and misinformation bring unnecessary fear and confusion to the people. They also undermine governments’ efforts to effectively mitigate and address the pandemic. Moreover, the misinfodemic also brings and spreads distrust of the people to their governments. Trust is the key factor of the global agenda on defeating COVID-19.
- Due to the polarized capabilities of COVID-19, for example on how the virus has different effects to people on different groups of age or gender, policies related to the handling of pandemic must be inclusive.

## **Way Forward:**

The panellists and discussants shared some thoughts to tackle the challenges in facing and handling the pandemic, as follows:

- Pandemic should not waver commitment to democracy, just as much as democracy should not hamper efforts to effectively address the pandemic. Governments and leaders must listen to the diverse perspective of the people and societies. Transparency and accountability of governments are the utmost important factors in order to establish a resilient democracy.
- To a broader extension, governments must increase its engagement with and empower the people, by strengthening democratic institutions, and to increase the capability of the people to participate in public policy making process.
- The Forum highlighted the importance of striving the balance between health and economic policies, and between strict health enforcement measures and the efforts to mitigate negative effects to the economy. A more expansive application of democracy must not focus only on political rights, but also to the economic and socio-cultural rights.
- Looking at the direct link between the impacts of the global pandemic and democracy itself, the Forum agrees that a stronger global cooperation is needed. Multilateralism cooperation is an important part to ensure a just global distribution of vaccines, accessible for every state and everyone. Economic cooperation to support the developing countries and least developed countries must be fostered.
- The pandemic is also an important lesson for every country to improve and develop their health infrastructures. Numbers of hospital, medical equipment, doctor, nurse, healthcare worker, medicines must reach adequate level. Moreover, it is also important to give more stimulation to scientific researches.

## **Conclusion & Recommendation:**

Conclusion and several recommendations are composed, as follows:

- The pandemic should not be a debate between the primacy of individual rights and the well-being of the community. Both can co-exist by approaching this issue from the solidarity perspective. Solidarity means understanding that individual rights come with a responsibility to comply with healthcare policies in handling the pandemic.
- Solidarity between countries at a global level is required to effectively defeat this virus. No one is safe until everyone is, and only through solidarity can we defeat the pandemic once and for all.



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**High Level Panel**  
***“the Role of States and Policy Makers in COVID-19 Pandemic”***

**Current Conditions & Challenges**

High Level Panel accommodated 6 (six) panellists and 190 discussants, highlighted some related issues on administrating democratic process while handling the Pandemic, as follows:

- The pandemic has become the biggest challenge to the world after World War II where the devastation of life and economic growth are experienced by all countries. The role of states and policy makers are inevitable and more important than ever to address the crisis.
- The panellists highlighted every country’s dilemmas between imposing strong health protocol and economic growth policies, as well as between protecting the health of the society and their human rights. Governments are urged to find the balance between the two.
- Countries have different capacities in addressing the pandemics resulting to different policies and approach. Some countries claim success in dealing with the pandemic, but the others are still struggling.

**Way Forward:**

The panellists and discussants in High Level Panel shared some common experiences to tackle the challenges during the pandemic, as follows:

- States are obliged to conduct swift actions to address the pandemic. Science-based policies, intensive contact tracing and massive tests are crucial to prevent and control the spread of the pandemic. Particular attention should also be given to vulnerable communities as well as conflict areas.

- Ensuring public trust and support is a key to effective health policies. It can be pursued, among others, by having an institutionalized consultation with the people, providing space for opinions to tackle disinformation, and imposing science-based approach and policies. The Government must readily change their approach based on the latest information especially from the scientific community.
- Government should adapt to a more innovative approach in holding democratic processes including to administer free and fair elections, facilitate online campaigns and online demonstrations.
- Communal or people-centric approach has been proven to be better than individual approach in solving any global crisis. Multilateral cooperation should be advanced to assist each other such as by sharing medical resources, financial aids and experiences to fight the pandemic.
- It is believed that democracy will come out stronger from the pandemic as it is promoting transparency and people-centric approach in handling the pandemic.

### **Conclusion & Recommendation:**

The High-Level Panel was concluded with the following conclusions and recommendations, as follows:

- Governments must balance their approach between protecting freedom of speech and fighting misinformation. Transparency and communication are important tools to fight misinformation. This approach is also important to communicating measures in fighting the pandemic, including the use of vaccines.
- Cooperation among states is important to conquer the pandemic. People-centric and communal approach should be put forward rather than individuality.



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**Cross-Panel Plenary**

**Current Conditions & Challenges**

Cross-Panel Plenary accommodated 4 panellists that highlighted key challenges discussed during their respective panel meeting discussion, as follows:

- Covid-19 pandemic has exposed deep fragility of inequality and climate emergency. These challenges must not undermine the value of democracy, especially when measures to contain pandemic require limitation of several kinds of freedoms, such as the freedom of movement, to assemble, and to develop economic activities.
- Several policy responses in addressing the pandemic exposed polarization within the society, and fragilities which could threaten human rights. In this regard, there is a strong need to balance the priorities between democratic and socio-economy policies with healthcare policies.
- Equitable health and social protection are keys for stability, prosperity, and resilience. Thus; vaccines, medicines, and other tools must be shared as public goods to ensure no one is left behind.
- Noting the deterioration of space for civil society and media in the region, including during the pandemic with excess restriction of information. The civil society and media are also facing difficulties in managing dwindling resources while continuing to provide adequate check and balance.
- The rise of global digital technology company has contributed to presence of threat to democracy by some media oligarchies, which spread bias information. We should adapt to this threat by underlining solidarity and collaboration between government, media, civil society and other stakeholders.
- There is a widening gap between political promises, political campaigns and the facts. Thus, political parties must be managed professionally and reduced the use of personal charisma and identity which contributed in widening the gap.
- The adverse impact of pandemic to the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises

(MSMEs)'s communities and the importance of supporting them to maintain resilient democracy that can deliver social and economic benefits, especially at the local and small community levels.

### **Way Forward:**

The panellists and discussants in Cross-Panel Plenary shared some good practices from composed from each panel, as follows:

- Build strong connection between pillars of BDF (government, media and civil society, youth, economy and business) especially in the preparation of the BDF, through joint programs.
- Embracing and enhancing solidarity could serve a chance to turn the decline of democracy, through efforts in providing fair and equitable access to vaccines and other shared health and socio-economic tools for the public to ensure no one is left behind. Hence the need to also strengthen multilateralism and regional solidarity in overcoming the pandemics while harnessing democratic values.
- In mitigating the impact of the pandemic, request the government to adopt non-discrimination policy, increase gender perspective, and involve civil society, including Adat community. Flourishing public trust should be established by listening to the need of the people, with a bottom-up approach.
- Civil-society, journalism, and local media need to use the advance of technology for democratic resilience, in disseminating news and promoting advocacy for regulation of ICT.
- Supporting youth-led actions for increasing awareness and endorsing new ways of life during the pandemic and help the government to fight misinformation and disinformation.
- Empowerment of MSMEs to survive the impact of COVID-19 pandemic especially through the use of digital economy platform as a new marketplace for MSMEs and provide broader and increased access to finance. In this regard, promoting capacity building and establishing synergy between stakeholders to support MSMEs will be essential, including with the involvement of regional and local Banks.
- Propose the establishment of Bali Economy Resilience Network to empower MSMEs with multi-stakeholder approach and support from financial institutions. The network can enhance the relevance of BDF to create stronger and inclusive society.

## **Conclusion & Recommendation:**

The Cross-Panel Plenary was concluded with the following conclusions and recommendations, as follows:

- Governments, civil societies, private sectors, students as well as media should go hand-in-hand in promoting democracy amidst the challenge of Covid-19 pandemic and at the same time to adjust their life by striking a balance between handling the pandemic and maintaining the livelihood.
- Active youth participation is important for countering misinformation and disinformation during the pandemic, and being digital natives and highly adaptive to technological changes they are also key to innovations for economic resilience and recovery.
- Democracy has to be followed with strong and resilience economy. Micro, Small Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) considered to have an important role for resilience democracy since they have proven effective as cushion for communities during economic and social hardship. They also represent the broad grassroots of a country which is central in sustaining democracy. Providing prosperity in grassroots level will strengthen democratic resilience. Thus, democracy and economy should go in hand in hand.



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**CONCLUSION OF BDF 13**

BDF 13 was closed by H.E. Teuku Faizasyah, Director General of Information and Public Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia. It was highlighted that wide variety of perspectives, lessons learned, innovations, and new ideas shared during the discussions have enriched participants with practical knowledge on how to advance democracy in their respective countries during the pandemic and its aftermath.

Some salient points from BDF 13 are as follows:

- Democracy provides a space for meaningful dialogue in public health policy-making during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially for trust-building and ensuring compliance with emergency health measures.
- To ensure that democracy continues to deliver during this challenging time, government should continue to promote transparency and engage all stakeholders in restoring social trust.
- Democratic norms are allowed to be adapted due to the challenging circumstances of COVID-19 pandemic as long as they are legitimate, measured, respect fundamental rights and liberty, and taken in the public interest and open to public scrutiny.
- Global leadership and international solidarity are keys to advance democracy during the pandemic and its aftermath. Collaborations for promoting human rights, engaging civil society, and using immediate science must be strengthened as part of solutions.
- Democracy remains an ideal formula for countries to progress, where peace, prosperity, and human welfare strive. In regards to Covid-19 vaccine, the principle of equality must be upheld in ensuring that vaccine is available and affordable to all countries.