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Letter

To involve or not to involve: youth participation in Indonesia's pandemic campaign

Nico Gamalliel^{1,2,*}, Reynardi Larope Sutanto^{1,2}, Adiba Nabila Hana Wardhani^{1,3}¹ National COVID-19 Volunteer, Indonesian Medical Students' Executive Boards Association, Jakarta, Indonesia² Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia³ School of Medicine and Health Sciences, Atma Jaya Catholic University of Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia

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The COVID-19 pandemic has unleashed unprecedented repercussions towards humanity, and in light of all the disruptions, developing countries are particularly hit with a bigger blow. Efforts outside the constraints of bureaucracy are thus needed more than ever in this trying time, and the youth may represent vast yet overlooked potency. Reports and studies continue to tout how the youth of Indonesia are willing to be involved as volunteers during the pandemic [1]. Moreover, our experiences have shown how an organized massive force of youth can help in COVID-19 handling.

More than 15,000 youth across the country had been deployed to educate their local communities on COVID-19. Mismanagement of testing and tracing policies resulting in several provinces tested lower than 1/1000 population [2] pushed us to coordinate and involve ±1,000 students to help trace cases in various regions. Recently, healthcare workers shortage with only 0.38 physicians per 1,000 population [3] which aggravated by deaths of healthcare professionals, stunted vaccination rate with only 9% of the population has been fully vaccinated [2], and the ongoing second-wave crisis [4] boosted the urgency to accelerate vaccination. We managed to gather ±10,000 students to support vaccination programs in the capital alone, helped to reach 1.5 million inoculations in 17 days to welcome the independence day on August 17th. Through supports by the youth, burdens placed on our healthcare system could hopefully be lifted; thus improving COVID-19 handling in Indonesia.

Unfortunately, the massive youth efforts faced lots of seemingly unnecessary obstacles. We discovered bureaucracy and lack

of communication between central-local authorities as frequent challenges that disrupt youth participation. Despite their lack of advanced knowledge and relative inexperience [1], the youth have willingness to learn and act quickly amidst the challenges during the pandemic; hence, stakeholders should give adequate support to this highly motivated massive force. Various roles in educating, tracing, and vaccinating may continue to be fulfilled by the youth in further involvement. New opportunities of volunteerism also could be further opened as enthusiasm for youth participation be encouraged.

Indonesia is still far from the end of the pandemic. Increased involvement of the youth, a large group in society, only becomes more important in the universal struggle to help the country. We echo the call made by our fellow students [5] for further involvement of youth in the fight against COVID-19. The youth may be the very key to deliver the country, or even the world, from the pandemic faster—and better.

Author Contributions

NG conceptualized the idea, developed the original draft, managed the revisions, and finalized the manuscript. RLS and ANHW developed the original draft and critically revised the manuscript. All authors checked and approved the final version submitted.

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* Correspondence: Nico Gamalliel, Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Indonesia, Salemba 6, Central Jakarta 10430, Indonesia, Tel: +62.21 3912477.

E-mail address: nico.gamalliel@ui.ac.id (N. Gamalliel).

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare there are no any other commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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