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Women and Pandemic: the power within social entrepreneurship

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ABSTRACT

Women is one of the groups worst affected during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Significant efforts need to be made by the community and government to empower women to survive the hardship. HOD Indonesia itself is a social entrepreneurship that focuses on empowering women at risk and victims of violence in Malang, East Java. This study aimed to analyze the strategy of the House of Diamond (HOD) Indonesia in maintaining its business so that it can support vulnerable women who work in it. Data gathering was carried out through non-participatory observation and in-depth interviews with founders, managers, and empowered women at HOD Indonesia. This study indicated that the strategies of HOD Indonesia in the Pandemic situation are by expanding their product lines (mask and hand-stitched clothes), holding to the core of ethical shopping in determining their market, and encouraging social entrepreneurship among the youngsters to save vulnerable women. To further its impact, HOD Indonesia maintains good relations with its longtime customers from Canada, the US, and some European countries. Their website, www.hod-indonesia.com, and marketing protocols promote ethical shopping and environmental awareness while describing the artisan behind these artworks. The strength of Indonesian HOD is building good communication between working mothers who face the same situation to be a solid team in facing the pandemic.

Keywords: women empowerment; social entrepreneurship; house of diamond Indonesia; social enterprises

INTRODUCTION

The current impact of Covid-19 is not merely a matter of health, but also various aspects of life such as social, political, democratic, and especially the economy at multiple levels (Asian Development Bank, 2020). It has also influenced the falling of the stock exchange market, oil prices and has generated a global economic recession (Kusno, 2020).

When this pandemic was confirmed in early 2020, there was mass panic in the community (Gunadha & Firdaus, 2020; Harsono, 2020). People bought a lot of food, drink, including domestic supplies like tissue and various necessities in supermarkets. Hoaxes and misleading information about Covid 19 in social media and Whatsapp groups made the situation was uncertain, and people lived in fear. Some other significant problems emerged, for example, the scarcity of masks, the massive termination of employment (Juaningsih, 2020; Syafrida et al., 2020), as well as a decline in operating profits in many micro, small and medium business sectors (Harirah & Rizaldi, 2020).

According to a survey by the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) on July 10 - 31, 2020, COVID 19 significantly decreases the level of one of the most vital economic supporting factors: household consumption (Soderborg & Muhtadi, 2020). It covers a great range of domestic consumption such as daily food consumption, clothes, transportations, housing, fuel, electricity and gas. The declines of these consumptions have affected many industries, and sadly women directly and indirectly.

When a country is locked down, many regions are socially restricted, affecting businesses and workers, including working women (Burki, 2020). From financial struggles and job loss during the coronavirus outbreak, data shows that a third of women from across the globe have been reported to experience salary reduction, layoffs, or temporary termination (LeanIn.Org & SurveyMonkey, 2020). At least 750 million women work in informal sectors, like farming, domestic assistance, baby sitting or small business enterprises, etc. Developing countries, like Indonesia, have a more female percentage in this category. They both are well shared in cities and countrysides.

This pandemic has introduced a challenging life never before experienced. Both parents and children do their supposed "normal" lives practically from home (Power, 2020). This, without a doubt, makes women do the extra miles. Some of them must keep working from homes while accompanying their children to study. Especially this comes harder for those whose husbands are laid off. These women must win the bread for their families, take care of their house chores/holds and still tutor their children to finish their school work.

Unfortunately, the discussion about women and the pandemic has not been well discussed and addressed in Indonesia. Several studies only focus on women's reproductive health when experiencing covid-19 symptoms. Several other studies demand more on women's role in the field of formal children's education and the success of the 'stay at home' movement by involving mothers (women) in the household (Saraswati & Susrama, 2020; Susilowati & Hakiem, 2020; Yuniti & Listihani, 2020). We eventually need more awareness or knowledge on what women truly need, especially during this pandemic. We need to know more about their sufferings, even traumatic experiences some may have.

This research has put strenuous efforts in finding those women with troubles and trying to understand how they manage to survive or at least what entities can help them stay. This search had led the research to find an MSME (micro, small and medium enterprises) called the Indonesian House of Diamond (HOD). Its core existence is to help

women with domestic violence and other women-related problems, especially during this pandemic.

HOD-Indonesia is a small textile business located in the city of Malang, East Java, Indonesia. Interestingly, it does not only sell goods for profit. It accommodates “marginalized” women in Malang who are invited to sew and sell various sewing products to foreign markets. This business entity creates a community that provides a comfortable and safe space for these women to build a better life.

The existence and character of HOD do reflect what a social business in the 21st century is. It is an era of collaboration between industry and society (Kanter, 1999). Companies must look back at how they get support from the community in their social environment to have a higher social impact (J. E. Austin, 2000). One new business concept that combines business with social impact is called social entrepreneurship. This concept gains popularity over the last decade. According to Bret Smith (El Fasi, 2011), there are four main components in social entrepreneurship: innovation, marginalized treats, social value, and sustainable systemic change. HOD Indonesia adopts this concept to run their business by having those four components.

Socialpreneurship is a form of industry that applies business skills in the non-profit sector (J. Austin et al., 2006). But HOD-Indonesia utilizes the workforce of people who have a low economy, and then the industrial profits are used to pay them to have decent lives. HOD-Indonesia also sells value in its products and is concerned with profit and how this value is sold through textile products.

Social entrepreneurship in Indonesia has started to develop with the emergence of several volunteers who accompany a group of unemployed people. They spread new business ideas, offer values, and then the business's products that can support their daily needs (Widiawati & Shalahuddin, 2019). Other researchers see a mindset as one of the causes for the underdevelopment of the economy of the lower classes. In addition, local government policies are often not based on precise indicators so that the goals of people's economic development are not achieved (Kartika & Muzayanah, 2015).

Just as in other business sectors, this pandemic has influenced HOD-Indonesia in running their business. For the past seven years, they have gained trust both from the marginalized women who work for them and their customers. Now, they need to change the difficulties into an opportunity to survive and keep giving impact to society, especially on the women they have worked with. Those women have lost their hopes and capacities to improve their potential. Even worse, many of them think negatively of their financial lives. They are likely to feel that they are destined to be poor and financially troubled forever. All they know is only to continue their days without having the power to control their future. It is difficult for them to start a new business even though they have good potential (Kurniawan, 2018).

Since the Covid-19 pandemic hit most MSMEs in Indonesia, HOD-Indonesia is proved to be able to survive. They succeeded in producing textiles and were able to market them overseas. HOD-Indonesia can solve social problems in its environment, especially those

related to marginalized women, and provide long-term solutions for a better life for women. This study aimed to see the strategies used by HOD-Indonesia to manage their business to survive in this current situation.

METHOD

This research used qualitative methods to explore the problems experienced by HOD-Indonesia. Qualitative methods are used because they can see the object of study in depth through a series of subjective techniques (Cresswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2009). The advantage of qualitative research is that it can see problems from the point of view of research objects challenging to reveal through questionnaires (Sugiono, 2017). Hence, this study used in-depth interviews with the founders, managers, and workers of HOD-Indonesia.

The data collection method in this study was carried out in several ways; first, we made observations on HOD-Indonesia. Researchers conducted non-participatory observations over three months. Second, the data during the observation were used as a source for interviews with the key informants, Nur Cholidah and Noor Fadilah, and HOD workers. We also obtained some documentation of HOD-Indonesia activities, company backgrounds and profiles, and data on female workers working there. From these data, we then process it according to social entrepreneurship and then make conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. COVID 19 Pandemic and its impact on women

The COVID-19 pandemic has a direct and indirect effect on women. A study conducted by the Institute for Fiscal Studies states that women earn less than men and are more likely to work in the informal sector than men. During this pandemic, women can be five times as vulnerable as men to lose their jobs (Burki, 2020). They can be one of the groups that are under the heaviest pressure when the pandemic continues.

Another study states that women are responsible for 75% of domestic work that is included in the unpaid work category, such as raising children, washing, cooking, and cleaning the house (Silva, 2019). Such responsibilities occur all over the world despite the development of the gender equality movement. This pandemic so worsens the women condition (Lewis, 2020). During a pandemic or not, women who are already working or not working do a lot of household chores and take less rest.

Women who support activities in the household also experience excessive stress because the children end up schooling from home, and the husband works from home. A poll conducted by the Kaizer Family Foundation (KFF) in America shows that 46% of women experience life disruption when the pandemic comes (Hamel et al., 2020). This condition certainly occurs in other countries, including Indonesia. Moreover, many women in Indonesia work informally outside the home, and then when they return home, they still have to cook and wash clothes.

This pandemic is mainly seen from the health and the national economy point of view. So, the policies only see macro and not explicitly addressed, such as to women in informal sectors. The International Labor Organization reports that informal sector jobs lack social protection for both workers and their families. At worst, most of the informal workers are women (ILO, 2020a). It may be caused that the economy carried out by women in informal sector is not considered to increase the gross domestic product (Power, 2020). The Indonesian government, for instance, has not thought about the impact of this pandemic on women. In general, the Indonesian government has provided assistance and fund to tourism businesses, including transportation and accommodation (Bahtiar & Saragih, 2020). The government also helps fund MSMEs, but there is no consideration for MSMEs involving women in this financing.

2. Social entrepreneurship

One of the largest sectors that attract female informal workers is in the garment industry. At least 80% of garment workers are women. This sector was one of the most affected during the Covid-19 pandemic, so that it indirectly affected women working in it (ILO, 2020b). HOD-Indonesia is also engaged in the garment sector, where the workers are marginalized women in Malang, East Java. Because the basis is not purely business, HOD-Indonesia must implement a particular communication strategy with its employees to maintain the quantity and quality of its production.

The concept used by HOD-Indonesia is commonly known as social entrepreneurship, which is shortened to sociopreneurship. Although it is a new term, economic activities that combine profit and social movements have long been carried out by several people, groups, or institutions. Sociopreneurship was initially associated with a social institution that started a business for profit, a purely non-profit corporation, or a company that developed its social responsibility.

Those definitions help us understand sociapreneurship as a phenomenon of applying business skills and skills for non-profit purposes (Thompson, 2002). Another thing that needs to be noted is that sociopreneurship does not prioritize profits or wealth from its business results but instead make a living and spread community values (J. Austin et al., 2006). Sociopreneurship can be implemented or seen in various communities, both on a private, public, institutional, and community basis, as long as these benefits are used the greatest for social welfare.

In addition to the above definitions, the explanation of sociopreneurship can be traced to many other studies (Light, 2006; Martin & Osberg, 2007; Massetti, 2008). Even Dacin et al., (2010) collected 37 definitions of sociopreneurship and got several keywords to understand this text, namely how the individual characters manage sociopreneurship, operationalize their community, use resources and how institutions use it, and the primary mission of the sociopreneurship.

For the definition of sociopreneurship to be clear, it is necessary to formulate several concepts proposed by Huybrechts & Nicholls (2012) and Dees (2001): sociopreneurship must adopt social values, not the values of individuals or specific groups of people. Sociopreneurship is also related to innovation, creativity, and the spirit of pursuing social interests instead of pursuing profit. Uniquely, the concept proposed by experts for sociopreneurship refers also to the courage to take steps without being limited by lacking resources. Finally, a sociopreneurship is accountable for its activities to its social environment. Dr. Brett Smith, an Assistant Professor and the founder of the center of Social Entrepreneurship at the Miami University in Oxford Ohio, introduced the four main components in social entrepreneurship (El Fasi, 2011), they are:

- a) Innovative capacity: adapting creativity and imagination within specific contexts and situations.
- b) Marginalized treat: power channels that are seen as opportunities and not problems.
- c) Social Value: adding changes among marginalized places.
- d) Sustainable Systemic Change: complete holistic change often in a long-time scope.

In the Indonesian context, the development of sociopreneurship proliferates. Several researchers developed a new style of business practice that prioritizes social society over profit (Suyatna & Nurhasanah, 2018). Several other studies use the concept of sociopreneurship for community empowerment programs so that their social life is better (Kurniawan, 2018; Widiawati & Shalahuddin, 2019). This development gives the impression that sociopreneurship has been understood and even carried out as a new social movement. Including what HOD-Indonesia has done to empower marginalized women in Malang is a form of sociopreneurship that should be appreciated.

3. House of Diamond Indonesia

From the interviews with the founders of House of Diamond Indonesia and the artisans and some supporting documentation, we found out that HOD Indonesia is a social entrepreneurship that focuses on women empowerment. It was established in Malang, East Java, Indonesia, in 2012 but managed professionally in 2015. The founders of this social business are sisters named Nur Cholidah and Noor Fadilah. They have been working in the fashion industry for decades before deciding to work on a social enterprise to impact their community.

HOD Indonesia produced several products such as blankets, throws, running tables, kimonos, and accessories. What special about their products is the process of making and who is behind the making. Each HOD product has a story behind it, from the making and who are the artisans. The customers will know it when they buy their products, so they do not just buy a product but also impact the artisans and their families. Like the concept of social entrepreneurship, a social business must move and generate people's awareness.

The founders of HOD did not realize before that they were doing a social business. At first, they just wanted to help disadvantaged women who came to them for jobs. These women

went without adequate skill, but they needed help. So, they tried to find the solutions. For more than five years now, they have made several efforts to make HOD Indonesia more impactful.

HOD Indonesia has some achievements as proof of its existence. In 2018, the founders of HOD Indonesia were selected to be mentors for the Social Entrepreneurship Award by Kopi Kapal Api (Akurat, 2021). It is a national competition, and they were mentoring the young entrepreneurs during the competition. In 2020, the Malang government awarded HOD Indonesia as a small and medium industry (IKM) with social impact in the Dekranasda Award (Satukanal, 2020). HOD Indonesia is also active in promoting and motivating young people to contribute to their community. They also appeared in some online news related to social entrepreneurship, such as in www.usahasosial.com, www.ajourneybespoke.com, www.nowjakarta.co.id, www.latitudestore.org.

Two major problems in the textile and garment industries are environmental problems (Dih Jatim, 2018) related to chemical substances and low wages (CNN Indonesia, 2018). Those reasons make HOD Indonesia give more attention to sustainability and the wages issues. HOD Indonesia tries to promote environmental awareness through its products using environment-friendly fabric such as using natural dye for the textile and recycling material. They also applied fair wages for their workers with a flexible working time.

A strong message also can be seen from their tagline “Shop HOD, Shop Good” on their website hod-indonesia.com. They want to educate people about ethical shopping and to be smart and impactful shoppers.

Today, HOD Indonesia has employed 30 women with various backgrounds. Some are single parents; some others are mothers and housewives. Each of them has a story of life to tell both struggles and traumatic experiences. They are marginalized women with limited access to education and skills. They have been trained basic skills by HOD Indonesia to earn money and make a better living for the families.

And most importantly, these women do not have to leave the house or family. They can still work from home at their own pace and take care of the family. This flexibility makes the workers like to work for HOD Indonesia.

4. HOD Indonesia Strategies

Product

In a business, a product becomes the most critical part of gaining profit. Before developing products, HOD Indonesia assessed the human resources they have. Since they employed women with limited skill, the HOD team thought about products that these women could easily make but still unique. So they decided to make throws with hand stitches. They chose hand stitch because these women do not know how to use sewing machines. Hand-stitch

products now become their signature. They also did market research in Australia, the USA, and Canada to see the market trend.

HOD Indonesia's products are very segmented because the products have values to promote ethical shopping and sustainability. According to the concept of market segmentation, there are four categories, namely geography, demography, behaviour, and psychography (Agustini, 2003). HOD Indonesia's market is closely related to the behaviour and psychography categories. Behaviour includes attitude, knowledge, and benefit to the customers, loyalty, and response, whereas psychography is more about lifestyle. From the interview with the HOD Indonesia founders, we found out that the buyer of their products is people with awareness and knowledge. The customers know why they must buy the products and what impact that they can contribute to society. So it is not only about buying things, but it is more about impactful shopping, and this market is very small in Indonesia. That is why the target market of HOD Indonesia is marketing in foreign countries such as the USA, Canada, and Australia.

Promotion

To reach the international markets, HOD Indonesia has to understand what the market wants. With the help of some volunteers and networks from Australia and the USA, they started to sort out what products can be sold in those countries and what promotion tools needed. The HOD Indonesia developed a website for the international market. The website is www.hod-indonesia.com and mainly written in English. It gives complete information about the products, artisans, and the history of the HOD. It also helps them to reach international wholesalers. From the website, it can be seen some wholesalers and partners they have been working with. Most of them are organizations or companies in some countries with the same ideology about ethical shopping and sustainability. Another platform they use is Instagram. With the popularity of this social media, HOD Indonesia is more well promoted. It has been two years since they managed their content on the website and social media to improve their ability to make content such as photos, videos, or captions. This small social business keeps improving itself.

Promotion is essential in selling a product, but it needs money to advertise a product to reach prospective buyers. HOD Indonesia is only a small social business with a limited budget for promotion. So they use different ways to promote the products. Some methods they use to market their products are finding wholesalers to minimize the loss because the wholesalers will order in bulk and pay in advance, they also pay for the shipping cost. The second is consignment with some stores in Jakarta dan Singapore. The third is joining bazaars that international organizations hold. The last method was halted during the pandemic. The wholesalers and retailers have a significant role in promoting the products so the HOD Indonesia can cut the promotion cost.

Innovation

It has been a year since the effect of the Covid 19 pandemic hit the globe. And it also affected HOD Indonesia. For one month at the beginning of 2020, they had to stop their productions due to the lockdowns in some countries. During the pandemic, their order dropped to 80%, and it also affected the artisans in HOD Indonesia. Luckily HOD Indonesia could see an opportunity when the mask scarcity happened around the globe. They started to produce masks regularly. Unfortunately, they can only employ workers who can operate sewing machines for this job to stop the hand-stitch products. In 2020 they have produced 20.000 masks with total transactions of up to IDR 300 million and delivered them to some countries. With the high demand for masks finally, they could cover all production costs and helping the other artisan who can not work during the pandemic. They also made 5000 masks and distributed them to all people who need them for free. This activity becomes part of their contribution to the community. They can see misfortune as an opportunity. Their innovation through creativity and adapting to the new situation is in line with one of the social entrepreneurship components by Brett Smith (El Fasi, 2011). The other components are marginalized, it is the ability to see problems as opportunities, and HOD Indonesia has shown their capability.

Now, they have started to make new products as the demand from the USA market for the summer. They also develop some new products such as Kimono, pyjamas, and accessories. Innovation becomes a vital component to survive this pandemic.

Communication

As social entrepreneurship, HOD Indonesia wants to contribute to the community through various activities. They give jobs to their workers and some training to develop themselves in skills and communication. The HOD Indonesia must build good communication since the workers come from different educational and social backgrounds.

As an organization, they also have an organizational structure that divides the flow of responsibility and communication. They have a commissioner, a director, Board, a Production manager, and team leaders. This is a simple structure considering the size of the organization and the effectiveness. Each position has the responsibility and allows them to make decisions in certain situations. In a small organization, generally, all organization members have responsibility relates to internal and external communication. Once it gets bigger, they can designate one person to be responsible for both communications (Gillis, 2006).

HOD Indonesia divides their team members based on the location of the worker. A team member will coordinate one particular area. One of the workers we interviewed, named Ririn is a team leader. She has a responsibility to distribute or collect the work from the team members (workers) and explains the type of work or helps if there are problems. The role of a team leader is to build good communication with the team member since they do

not always communicate directly with the production manager. These artisans work from home, so it is easier if they talk to the team leader.

As a team, HOD Indonesia tries to build informal communication with the team through some activities such as training, gathering and communicating through a Whatsapp group. HOD Indonesia does not only build communication between employer and employee but also as friends. HOD Indonesia knows the detail of the personal problems and situations of each worker. In depth family related problem interview is also a part of the recruitment process. This is vital to decide the workload. For instance, Ririn, who had worked in a garment factory for 16 years, resigned due to her sickly just born baby. When joining HOD Indonesia, she explained her situation and eventually is permitted to work from home to take care of her baby.

Another woman who had cancer was allowed to work with time flexibility for her medical treatment. HOD Indonesia also involved not only in work matters but also improved their workers' life quality. They provided simple financial training so these women can manage their family finances, giving English classes to teach their children with English homework. Interpersonal communication becomes essential for HOD Indonesia in keeping this social business because they take care of the worker personally. Each of the workers in HOD Indonesia has double or triple roles in their life, as employees, mothers, housewives, or as daughters for their parents. And all functions conflicted and quickly made them stressed out. To release the tensions, people need to communicate them to someone else. Interpersonal communication is believed to decrease emotion and ignite positive feelings (Hasanah, 2015). HOD Indonesia has made this approach through their activities and communications.

Another aspect that influences the success of HOD Indonesia to build good internal and external communication is the English skill. Both of the founders of HOD can speak English pretty well, making them communicate with the wholesalers, partners, and volunteers from different countries more easily. It is proven that mastering an international language can open a broader opportunity.

5. Challenges for social entrepreneurship

Managing a social business is more complex than a typical business, said Noor Fadilah, the production manager and also the founder of HOD Indonesia, but yet it is more fulfilling. For them, it is not only about financial benefit but also happiness for helping others. HOD Indonesia has contributed and made an impact on the community. The process does not stop from selling things and gaining profits but assisting these women in having a better life

Since HOD Indonesia was established in 2012, they have faced many challenges from the internal and external factors of the organization. The internal problems they face are about the lack of motivation from the workers. From the 30 women who work in HOD Indonesia,

only 16 people are active, and the rest are not just on and off. According to Nu Cholidah, the founder of HOD Indonesia, breaking poverty is not an easy job because it involves a solid and dedicated mindset. They can offer thousands of opportunities, but people must decide whether they want to take them or not. Most people want to earn a lot of money fast. Living in a patriarchal society like in Indonesia, women have been raised with certain beliefs and dogmas that weaken them.

The external problem they experience is limited support from the government. The supports they need are in the form of simplified business licenses, tax-related to exporting products, and funding. So far, HOD Indonesia has to deal with these problems by itself. As non-profit-oriented social entrepreneurship, the government should also pay attention to these problems because it has been proven to empower women and their families.

CONCLUSION

Social entrepreneurship is a potential business entity that can solve the social problems in our community. If we refer to the four components of social entrepreneurship by Brett Smith (El Fasi, 2011) from the innovation, marginalized treat, social values and sustainability, HOD Indonesia has those four components. They have shown their consistency in empowering women and directly improve the quality of their family. This study showed that communicating with external and internal stakeholders is the primary key for HOD Indonesia to survive this pandemic. They can maintain good communications with the wholesalers and partners overseas to maintain the business through product innovation. They can see the opportunities and adjust to the situation well without neglecting their core of ethical shopping and sustainability. The other strength of Indonesian HOD is building good communication between working mothers who face the same situation as a solid team in confronting the pandemic.

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