

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Forum Kajian Pembangunan (FKP) Webinar**

#### **“Second-Year Update: The Resilience of Vulnerable Communities and Readiness of Nutrition and Maternal and Child Health Services in Facing the COVID-19 Pandemic”**

Jakarta, 19 October 2021 — After more than a year of the pandemic, public perceptions of the risks of the COVID-19 pandemic and the readiness of nutrition and maternal and child health (MCH) services have changed. People are starting to adapt to the pandemic situation and this affects their resilience and strategies to minimize the impact of the pandemic.

#### **In the second year, the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable households has become more diverse**

The pandemic has not only impacted the economic and health sectors, but also intrahousehold relations as well as household-community relations. To mitigate such impact, households and communities have attempted various coping/adaptation strategies, be they strategies focused on problem-solving or those on emotional self-regulation.

#### **Households have only coped with the pandemic and not yet adopted more permanent adaptation strategies**

The way households cope is through temporary and quick responses to changes and impacts of the pandemic. Ana Roshida Tamyis (SMERU senior researcher) said, “At the community level, such adaptation has relied on the community’s organization system.”

Some regional governments have made a number of technical innovations in support of policies to control/reduce the impact of the pandemic so that the policy implementation can run more effectively and efficiently. Building the resilience of vulnerable communities during the COVID-19 pandemic is still a long process filled with challenges. Multistakeholder collaborations are needed to support the process of building resilience. “Our study recommends that the government strengthen the pandemic mitigation policies so that they can be coherent between and at all government levels, ensure consistency of the policy implementation, and be responsive to the changes in the impact of the pandemic on people,” Ana Rosidha Tamyis said.

#### **Public perceptions of risks need to be improved through effective risk communication to eliminate false sense of security**

For over a year of the pandemic, public perceptions of the risks of COVID-19 have changed and tended to decline. This situation is driven by various factors, including considerations on the various kinds of risks and people’s false sense of security. Effective risk communication can be a way to address the false sense of security as well as reinforce sustainable and consistent adaptive behavior regarding adherence to health protocols.

#### **Community organizational capacity needs to be strengthened to support collective adaptation**

One of the ways is to hold training for volunteers as well as to engage and facilitate the people in community-level pandemic mitigation programs.

People’s resilience in facing the pandemic is not only found at the individual and community levels. Providers of health services, including nutrition and MCH services, have demonstrated their ability to survive in service provision during the pandemic. Providers of health services continue to develop

innovations with various adjustments during the pandemic. The innovation readiness of the nutrition and MCH services affects the ability of mothers to use these services.

SMERU's research findings show that the achievements of health services for mothers, babies, and children under five years old experienced a decline in the first six months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Regional governments had attempted to implement various innovations, from increasing home visits to utilizing internet access for online services. However, a number of factors inhibited the efforts for such innovations.

### **Structural problems are one of the factors inhibiting mothers' access to nutrition and MCH services**

One of the structural problems that has long existed even before the pandemic is the lack of awareness among mothers about the importance to access nutrition and MCH services. This issue has hampered the efforts to reach the targets set for the nutrition and MCH services, especially at the regional level. For that reason, SMERU's study recommends that the government formulate special communication strategies needed to enrich the knowledge of mothers and their support system about the coronavirus as well as the nutrition and MCH services.

In addition, efforts to expand health services are still needed, especially in areas with limited access to health services. Nurmala Selly Saputri (SMERU researcher) said, "Efforts that can be made are to continue increasing the distribution of health workers, optimizing the maternity waiting home program, expanding the coverage of the JKN [National Healthcare Financing Scheme] program participation, and increasing the BPJS [Social Security Implementing Agency]-Health partnerships with private health facilities".

### **Telemedicine services can be a long-term solution for structural problems and problems arising from the pandemic**

The pandemic has brought about people's fear of potential exposure to COVID-19. This issue is found to have contributed to delaying the provision of health services that mothers and children under five should have immediately received. "Service innovations by the regions have not been easy to develop because the inhibiting factors stem from structural problems that had existed since before the pandemic, including health personnel shortages, limited transportation and road access, economic difficulties, and cultural influences," said Nurmala Selly Saputri.

To ensure that nutrition and MCH services can survive and undergo innovations during and after the pandemic, the central and regional governments are urged to collaborate to resolve the existing problems. The telemedicine system can be a useful innovation to help overcome the issue of health personnel and facility shortages.

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Speakers' presentation slides can be downloaded on <https://smeru.or.id/en/fkp-19okt2021en>.

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