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Accelerating SDG 11 Achievements During Covid-19 Crisis: Protecting Children Living in Slums' Rights

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ABSTRACT

Rapid urbanization in metropolitan areas resulted in a mounting number of slum dwellers such as street children, insufficient basic infrastructures, and services. Hence, the world pledges 'sustainable cities and communities' under the Sustainable Development Goals 2030, which aims to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable for everyone. The objective becomes explicitly vital due to the spread of COVID-19, as over 90 per cent cases are befallen in urban areas. Slum neighborhoods areas are constituted as the most at-risk urban locations which recorded the highest numbers of infectious cases. Hence, this article summarizes SDG 11, focusing on Target 11.1 and Target 11.5 to guarantee access to adequate, safe, affordable housing and essential services for all humans and upgrading slums. Both targets aim to significantly reduce the number of deaths and people affected by direct economic loss due to disasters. The primary purposes of this paper are to explain the challenges faced by the children living in slums in exercising their human rights, particularly during the pandemic epoch and legal analysis on the Convention on the Rights of Child (CRC). This writing is socio-legal research using a qualitative approach. This paper infers that the survival of the children living in slums, particularly during this turbulent Coronavirus spread, SDG 11 is among the significant goals that need to be executed urgently. Thus, the paper proposes the world to adhere to the aspirations of SDG 11 to protect vulnerable groups, including children living in slums during this challenging period.

Contribution/Originality: The main contribution in writing this article is to look at the angle of protecting the rights of children living in slums during the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) crisis and understand the sustainability objectives of SDG 11, Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (SDG 2030). Therefore, the idea of this writing is new and authentic and can contribute to the field of legal and social knowledge.

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1. Introduction

The world's current population is 7.9 billion and continuously growing every day. It is estimated that by the year 2100, the world will reach 16 billion inhabitants. This exponential population growth is due to urbanization in the cities and many modern technological innovations, not limited to communication, construction, or product only. The modernization includes artificial intelligence, medicine, robotics, space, etc. The vibrancy of technological development, especially in urban areas, has caused many people in rural areas to migrate to the city as they dream of improving their standard of life. According to the United Nations, the migration trend is expected to continue even though cities around the world are already flooded with more than half of the world's inhabitants. With the current situation, more than two-thirds of the population will become urban dwellers living in slums by 2050 (United Nations, 2019).

Those who fail to forge success had to live in poverty and marginalization in the city. The influx of population has led to the birth of various street communities consisting of adults and children. Therefore, a proper urban development program is vital to ensure social issues such as extreme poverty, equality, climate change, and health can be administered accordingly. Cities development will determine either the success of inclusive economic growth or yield to greater inequality. Besides that, cities symbolize modernization or development as many pursue prospects for education and employment (Tasneem, 2012). Hence, achieving SDG 11 is significant, as it sets the platform to reach for the other 16 goals of SDGs 2030. SDG 11 aims to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. There are seven targets under this goal to ensure access to safe and affordable housing, public transportation and green spaces, and cities resilient to natural disasters—moreover, the SDG 11 targets to protect vulnerable people by minimizing economic loss (United Nations, 2015).

Children living in slums are vulnerable communities forced to live in deplorable conditions without a proper place called a house equipped with basic amenities such as clean water supply, electricity supply, sanitation facilities, etc. Such a situation has a terrible impact on their lives in terms of safety and health. The condition especially becomes more complex when the world is hit by the COVID-19 pandemic as early as 2019. It is reported that over 90 per cent of COVID-19 cases occurred in cities areas making these people who are living in this vulnerable state have to face the risk of being exposed to the Coronavirus. Complying with lockdown orders to prevent the spreading of the virus is challenging for the children living in slums as many of them did not own a house. In addition, they also find it is hard to practice personal hygiene due to the lack of basic facilities and supplies for self-cleaning. Other than that, the pandemic has also caused enormous impacts on people's daily lives worldwide. During the curfew, they also dealt with energy source problems such as electricity supply and internet resources. Moreover, other economic and social issues continue to increase, such as extreme poverty, health problems such as malnutrition, stunted growth, excessive hunger, crimes, abuses, and many others, especially among street children (Emmanuel Raju et al., 2021; Lorente et al., 2020)

Furthermore, various economic activities, policies, and development programs were postponed due to the COVID-19 attack, causing the SDGs 2030 progress to slow down. The postponement of these pre-arranged development programs is frustrating for vulnerable groups, especially in this very perilous circumstance. The children living in slums are in dire need of help to save themselves and survive the pandemic epoch. Apart

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from that, they must also ensure an educational platform so that there are no dropouts. Thus, all governments must continue to persevere on achieving the mission pledged. Among others, it is crucial for the targets set out in SGD 11 to be focused on as they are fundamental human rights that must be preserved for all people, especially the vulnerable ones. At this very critical time, a good house can help ensure children's safety, especially in times of pandemics, as they are put at a greater risk of danger than in a normal situation. Moreover, a house will assist in implementing other fundamental rights such as health and other development rights for children. Lack of proper legal protection is considered a form of human rights violation, and it is a wrongful act from the point of view of the law. Therefore, every government in the world's countries needs to continue the SDGs 2030 despite facing various difficulties and challenges implementing it during COVID-19.

2. Materials and Methods

The paper adopted is socio-legal research using a qualitative approach. Primary and secondary data were collected through library studies and using publicly available data, namely the internet. All pieces of information are analyzed critically using the content analysis method.

3. Literature Review

The first human cases caused by the novel Coronavirus, also known as the COVID-19, were reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) on December 31, 2019. The virus, also known as SARS-CoV-2, has been identified with a wholesale food market in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. Therefore, the marketplace is instructed to be close as it is believed to be the source of this epidemic. However, only in March 2020, the COVID-19 was confirmed as a global pandemic. Till August 2021, there are more than 205 million positive cases reported, with 4.32 million death records worldwide. The viral infection continues to rise after about two years of its first encounter, even though few available vaccines are available starting from December 2020 (Yen-Chin Liu, 2020).

According to the World Bank Group, there are few links between living conditions in slums with exposure to the COVID-19 virus. Among others, the article had listed overcrowded living conditions, limited access to essential services, reliance on crowded transport services, and specific aspects of working in the informal sector as factors that caused increase exposure to an infectious disease such as COVID-19. Besides that, the paper recommends a few suggestions for slum dwellers to address the COVID-19. The recommendations can be divided into three categories: short term approach, medium-term approach, and long-term approach. It mainly focuses on social, economic, and environmental approaches such as (i) increase sanitation and hygiene; (ii) ensuring health services and vaccination; (iii) scale-up slum upgrading and house development; and (iv) promote economic and spatial inclusion (World Bank Group, 2020).

Few other papers arrived at the same conclusion that the spreading of COVID-19 is intense in slums areas compared to non-slums. There are serious concerns about the potential burden of COVID-19 in this kind of area based on epidemiological vulnerability, transmission vulnerability, health system vulnerability and vulnerability to control measures. Examples of transmission vulnerability are social mixing and hygiene infrastructure, which are highly related to people living in slums. It had been proven quantitatively in few research pieces as these areas are way too crowded for space distancing and isolation if one person is symptomatic (Shaikh Mehdi et al., 2021; Anand

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Sahasranaman et al., 2020). In combating the virus, basic facilities to practice sanitation and hygiene are required; but lacking in slums. Issues such as access to safe water supply, toilet systems, and poor air quality are among problems that have long been protracted. Besides that, many biohazard risks such as the COVID-19 are posed to the public as waste disposal is often inadequate in slums areas. As a result, the waste collectors are being exposed to more significant harm from the polluted waste. In addition, many of the slum dwellers do not have an exclusive room for themselves; in fact, the so-called 'house' is usually a small, overcrowded and poorly constructed shelter lacking basic infrastructure and amenities (Benigna Boza-Kiss et al., 2021). Slums are an uncomfortable, inconvenient, and dangerous place to live for any human, specifically for children. Based on research in Bangladesh and India, there are practical constraints on implementing the conventional COVID-19 management approaches like social distancing or not sharing spaces and consistent cleanliness leading to spreading the virus. Hence, whether airborne or droplets transmissions such as SARS or SARS-CoV-2, infectious disease is very high in slums, as for that, governments need to establish short-, and long-term pandemic management approaches, especially in sustainable urban planning and health services (Shaikh Mehdi et al., 2021; Emmanuel Raju et al., 2021; Somenath Ghosh et al., 2020).

The control measure is very significant based on the world's past experiences facing numerous disease outbreaks such as Influenza A (H1N1), Cholera, Ebola and many others. Failure to implement a good control measure can be caused severe harm to society at large. In the COVID-19 context, many governments had come up with safety measures such as quarantine, lockdowns, self-isolation, travel bans and the closure of public places, including offices and schools. The situation impacted the family economy and caused more social problems such as extreme poverty, social discrimination, and interruption of development rights. Among the most critical developmental rights in children living in slums is the right to education. Living in slums means a lack of proper education provided for the children in that area. Accepting schooling in traditional methods alone is rare in children living in slums, not to mention receiving an education using advanced devices and modern technology. Due to economic and geographical factors, it is almost impossible for children to access internet services for online educational purposes. The main problem faced is the high cost of the internet, thus creating a gap to access, disseminate and exchanging digital information among the community or known as the 'digital divide' (Grasmick, 2015; Lorente et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the internet is a service usually available in urban and developed areas depending on the public's demand. However, considering cost and profit factors, most of these services only exist in strategic geographical locations. Therefore, children living in slums are not likely to enjoy internet services for educational purposes (Olasile & Emrah, 2020; Lorente et al., 2020). Thus, even though the COVID-19 pandemic and related containment measures have worsened urban inequalities, they indirectly highlighted these vulnerable slum dwellers' challenges. In addition, some recovery measures and policy responses helped them improve their lives. In addition, the lockdown orders impact the slum citizens as the world becomes concerned about their life issues, such as urban energy poverty, digital divides, and slum's basic infrastructures. As a result, many world governments had come out with several solutions to ensure the survival of vulnerable slum-dwellers, including children. For example, addressing entrenched inequalities in shelter and energy access enhances equity in access to online work and education and slum up-gradation to improve living conditions and security (Mahendra Sethi et al., 2021; Friesen et al., 2020). These recommendations are human-rights-based, and any non-compliance can be considered a violation of human rights. Henceforth, this

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topic's legal aspects must be analyzed to uphold justice for everyone, including the vulnerable ones. Besides that, the world is obliged to comply with the standards embedded in international documents like treaties and conventions. Therefore, the paper will only focus on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) for legal analysis, emphasizing Target 11.1 and 11.5 of SDG 11. The children's rights that will be investigated are life and liberty, social protection and education.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Children Living in Slum: Compliance to Human Rights

Inadequate housing causes negative impacts on social inclusion, livelihood opportunities, and human safety. Children living in slums are considered marginalized. The surrounding communities abandon them, and their countries are supposed to act as their protector. However, before the SDGs 2030, many countries' development plans left the vulnerable groups behind, causing the social gap to widen. Their fundamental rights to live the inadequate standard of living were denied as they do not have access to adequate, safe, affordable housing and essential services. Without a suitable house, the slum dwellers were exposed to extreme weather such as scorching heat, heavy rains and other natural disasters, which will affect their lives and health directly (Friesen et al., 2020).

The condition is not getting any better when the COVID-19 hits the world as children living in slums need to face various challenges dealing with the virus attack in minimal living conditions. They are highly exposed to the virus infection due to risk factors in their area of residences or slums. It is almost impossible to practice social distancing for people living in slums because of the high density of the buildings. Besides that, this kind of resident's household or social structure is very flexible, whereby people living in slums do not have their own private space. Slum-dwellers can move between houses, sharing food, sleeping corners, and toilets as no formal boundaries are fixed between them. Slums also have poor ventilation making it even riskier for disease or virus transmission. According to the WHO, cleaning helps to remove the virus or reduce it on contaminated surfaces. Henceforth, everyone needs to practice cleaning with water, soap, or natural detergent. However, clean water access is limited as no water supply is provided for people living in slums. The slum dwellers must queue to collect it from the water points to get the water supply. Besides that, they must buy the water at a high price from the private provider, making handwashing a waste. Additionally, the toilet system, waste disposal or sanitation is very unstructured and inadequate in slums areas. Such unhygienic living conditions put the slum communities, especially children, at risk of being infected by COVID-19 and other contagious diseases. It simply shows that the protection level of their human rights is jeopardized by forcing them to live in that wretched condition (Shaikh Mehdi et al., 2021, Somenath Ghosh et al., 2020).

In addition, children living in slums face social discrimination and are deprived of their rights to self-development. Their living conditions are so deplorable, thus rendering children unable to receive formal education. The problems associated with children living in slums' standard education stem from many factors such as legal identity, economic capability, and awareness. These children usually receive education through informal means such as assistance by private bodies or self-learning with limited resources. They were used to the traditional method of learning using tools like boards, books, and stationaries compared to the modern learning techniques involving new technological devices and applications such as computers, smartphones, the internet, software, video

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recording, podcast, and others. Nevertheless, multiple series of lockdowns announced worldwide due to the epidemic had caused many schools, including sponsored education centres for vulnerable children, to be closed. As an alternative, many had moved to online education to ensure the education process did not stop. But the current education field incurs prohibitive costs and requires a whole new set of skills (Lorente et al., 2020; Grasmick, 2015).

Hence, children living in slums were put in a very complex situation to receive even non-formal education due to limited facilities and low budgets. As a result, they are denied equal opportunity and platform, causing them to lose the platform to maximize their capabilities in all aspects of life development. In the future, they will continue to live in extreme poverty without the opportunity to get a good job. Problems of extreme hunger, homelessness, health symptoms, social issues, involvement in crime are just some examples of problems that will affect the children living in slums' lives. It is regrettable because vulnerable groups' life cycle is cyclical until they are broken through government assistance, the private sector, and the community, especially in a very acute pandemic era encountered by the world nowadays. Such a situation implies the sustainability that is fought for is unachievable; in fact, it stimulates discriminatory development (Olasile & Emrah, 2020).

This situation does not end there; it leads to Target 11.5, aiming to significantly decrease the number of deaths and people affected by direct economic fatalities relative to a global gross domestic product caused by disasters. The objective focuses on protecting the poor and people in various vulnerable situations. The aim is very much in line with the current situation in which many of the world's population, particularly vulnerable groups such as children living in slums who have had to face an economic crisis over a long time. For example, children in the vulnerable groups had to face the risk of death, the COVID-19 virus infection and various post-COVID-19 health conditions. However, the epidemic did not solely cause their deaths and health problems but the impact of the unstable family economy. Due to multiple and prolonged lockdowns, thousands of business entities worldwide succumbed, making many families lose their income sources (Puteri Marjan & Theebalakshmi, 2020). As a result, vulnerable people living in a slum must face a daily struggle to survive. Likewise, children living in slums are no longer allowed to do typical street work and earn income to help their families during the pandemic, worsening the condition. Henceforth many children, especially those living in slums, must face extreme hunger, malnutrition, not getting vaccinations, no treatment for diseases, being physically, sexually, and emotionally abused. These explanations showed that a proper house is essential in attaining balanced human rights and maintaining one's health, social and economic status. Therefore, both Targets 11.1 and 11.5 need to be examined and appropriately executed to improve the quality of the slum dwellers, especially the children.

4.2. Protecting Children Living in Slums During COVID-19 Crisis

The legal analysis of the CRC will be divided into three categories, namely rights to life and liberty, social protection, and development. These provisions are embedded in the CRC guide or set a benchmark for the state's members regarding children protection (United Nations Human Rights, 1990). All 193 rectifier countries are obligated to fulfil the children's rights, including the marginalized children living in slums.

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For rights to life and liberty, the related articles are Article 2, Article 6 and Article 24. Article 2 explains on non-discrimination principle, whereby every child is entitled to all rights asserted in the Convention. Children face all kinds of discrimination, either direct or indirect discrimination, due to their young age, as they are always regarded as immature and incapable of decision making. Such a situation is worst for vulnerable children, for example, one with a disability, non-citizen like refugees and asylum seekers or, as discussed, children living in slums. It is vital to safeguard all children, especially the vulnerable ones, from arbitrary treatment, especially in this pandemic. However, differences in treatments required legit reasons. Therefore, any policy, strategy or development program must include all children living in slums regardless of their backgrounds or families'. The government owes a duty to prepare an equal platform for its young generation to maximize their potentials and close the existing social gaps. Article 6 focuses on the right to life which includes both survival and development aspects. Children living in slums must be given the opportunity to live a healthy life, physically and mentally. By ensuring that their lives are always protected, they can explore their capabilities and improve their life status. Hence, the content of Article 24 is also important to be observed as it recognizes the right of children to access the best health care possible, clean water, healthy food, and a clean and safe living environment. Other than that, the article mentions the right for children in slums to get information about wellbeing and security to make it possible to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health.

Rights concerning the social protection of children living in slums are mentioned in Articles 19, 34, 36 and 39. Isolation and losing sources of income due to the COVID-19 cause many people to face stress and severe depression, leading to domestic abuse. Many women and children, especially girls, are at risk of being abuses during a lockdown. Children living in slums have already lacked access to healthcare and other social protection services and do not possess any safe place to self-isolate. Article 19 addresses violence against children, emphasizing protection against physical and mental violence, including neglect, sexual abuse, and exploitation. Every government must draft relevant laws, implement security measures, and spread public awareness to prevent child maltreatment as such actions can be very damaging. Besides that, for children to be adequately treated also means living with respect and dignity. They should not be degraded based on their age factor or other existing reasons because children are also human beings. The protection is further extended in which Article 34 explains specifically sexual abuse and violence. Children should be protected from any unlawful sexual or pornographic activities. According to Article 36, they must not be exploited for any reason, for example, used in labour, crimes or political agenda or media in a way they did not wish to. Therefore, it is crucial for the children's welfare to be prioritized at all times. Last but not least is Article 39, which says that all children are entitled to the right to recover from complex events that fall upon them, for example, all types of violence or exploitation, neglect, torture, armed conflict, and trafficking. These provisions safeguard the vulnerable children living in slums to recover from difficult moments and continue living in an environment that values their lives and promotes dignity.

Finally, discussion on related articles for rights to self-development is also fundamental as the attack of the COVID-19 has decelerated children's development progress. A right to self-development is found in Article 27, which explains that children must live in a way that helps them reach their full potential in all aspects of life. Henceforth, the government must ensure that all children, including those living in slums, have access to nutritious food and adequate housing because these factors will directly impact their live performance. Moreover, it is crucial for children's physical, mental, spiritual, and moral to

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be secured by all means to achieve the world's sustainability. Besides that, Article 29 aims to protect children's rights to quality education, presenting the aspiration of development. Besides that, education is the only tool that can help to change one's social status permanently as it elevates one's skill, personality, thinking capability and talents. Even though it may necessitate a longer period, it is the most effective method, cheaper and provides everlasting impact. However, based on research, many children living in poor conditions such as slums, extremely poor or stays in remote areas have difficulties accessing education due to digital divides. In the future, such situations will be causing wider social gaps, discrimination, and unsustainable development within society.

Based on these articles provided under CRC, children living in slums' rights are violated for many reasons. One of the critical issues is not having a proper house with complete basic facilities. Without a place to live, the children are at risk of many hazards that will affect their physical condition and mental or emotional stability. As discussed earlier, the world's current situation, which hits by the COVID-19, has marked many negative impacts on the children living in slums. Therefore, legal analysis of the CRC is vital to ensure that the law recognizes their rights. Later, all provisions need to be executed significantly by the executive body and society at large. Above all, it is significant to include a discussion on Article 3, which is the core principle of the CRC, namely, the best interest of a child, which promotes all entities to prioritize children's welfare in any situation or decision-making process. The implementation of this article requires every child to be treated individually, especially for child protection purposes.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper concludes that it is challenging for the children who live in slums to exercise their human rights, particularly during the COVID-19 era. Among the violated rights are rights to life and liberty, rights to social protection and rights to self-development. However, human rights provisions mentioned in the CRC are recognized by the law to be applied to children.

Hence, this paper recommends that every world government comply with the standard set up at the international level. New laws can be drafted, while the old ones can be amended accordingly to guarantee that the protections provided are up to modern-day standards. It is also suggested that targets set up in the SDGs 2030, mainly SDG 11, be observed closely and executed immediately to safeguard the lives of children living in slums who have been denied a proper house leading to violation of rights to health and development. At the current COVID-19 pandemic, the poor and vulnerable groups such as children living in slums need to move and be placed in temporary protection shelters equipped with basic infrastructures for their survival. It is one of the alternatives to stop the virus from transmitting to other areas and affecting more people. Besides that, such action can avoid more death, especially among children who are more vulnerable than adults.

Moreover, aids such as health and educational support also can be provided before being transferred to a good house. It is vital to ensure that the children living in slums' rights to development are protected like any other normal children to achieve SDGs 2030. The pandemic had been within our lives for almost two years now, and there is so far no absolute time can be expected for the virus to be gone forever. Therefore, it is believed that, instead of postponing the 2030 agenda, the world shall take this golden opportunity to advance every possible effort in realizing the targets. Even though it is undeniable that

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millions of people worldwide are suffering from health and financial problems, the virus has blurred the line between society's status quo. The pandemic has made humans rethink and reconsider almost every aspect of life. It also presents a new roadmap to humanity that allows vulnerable people to be taken care of. The government must develop a sustainable urban city plan and good health services for these people. Economic supports such as decent works or agricultural strategies are also needed to sustain their lives. In this very tough period, the world must adhere to the aspirations of SDG, leaving no one behinds.

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Conflict of Interests

The author has no conflict of interest.

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