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## INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)

Article DOI: 10.21474/IJAR01/11605

DOI URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/11605>



### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE COVID-19 RESPONSES

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#### Manuscript Info

##### Manuscript History

Received: 30 June 2020

Final Accepted: 31 July 2020

Published: August 2020

#### Abstract

It can surely be assumed that the recent outbreak of the Covid-19 will have a detrimental impact not only on the economy, but also on the tourism industry. This paper proposes a framework that can be used to assess the effectiveness of government responses that has been made to sustain the tourism industry during the pandemic. The paper took ideas from several credible sources including the World Tourism Organization and other published research papers. We examined that a government response that can help sustain the tourism industry during the pandemic should take into consideration several aspects such as people, economy, culture, and community of the country. The framework was then used to assess the responses made by the Philippines government in trying to mitigate the negative impact of Covid-19 on the tourism industry of the country.

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#### Introduction:-

The tourism industry without a doubt is the most important industry in the Philippines. In 2018, the tourism industry solely accounted for 12.7% of the Philippines' total GDP, which was around 42.02 billion USD. Meanwhile, the tourism industry also played a role in solving the employment crisis, as 13.0% of the total employees in the Philippines, which was around 5.4 million people, were employed in the tourism industry. Nonetheless, the recent government policies such as the announcement of the lock-down, home quarantines, suspension of working classes, and closures of malls, impacted several industries, but mainly the tourism industry. It is estimated that these government policies would stifle the growth of the tourism industry, which would eventually stagnate economic growth. Due to the emergence of the new pandemic, whether the government can sustain the economic growth is in question. Hence, this paper presents a framework that can assess the efficiency of the government response in regards to the tourism industry during the pandemic.

#### Methodology:-

The aim of the paper is to create a framework that can be used to assess whether a government response is sustainable for the tourism industry during a pandemic. Any knowledge for this paper has been acquired from several credible sources including the World Tourism Organization, Crandall, W. R., and Mensah, E. C's Crisis management and sustainable development research paper, Roeser, S., Hillerbrand, R., Sandin, P., & Peterson, M's Introduction to Risk Theory paper, Stefan F. Schubert's Tourism and unemployment paper, Mary E. Guy and Sean A. McCandless's Social Equity: Its Legacy, Its Promise paper, and lots of other credible research papers published in google scholars.

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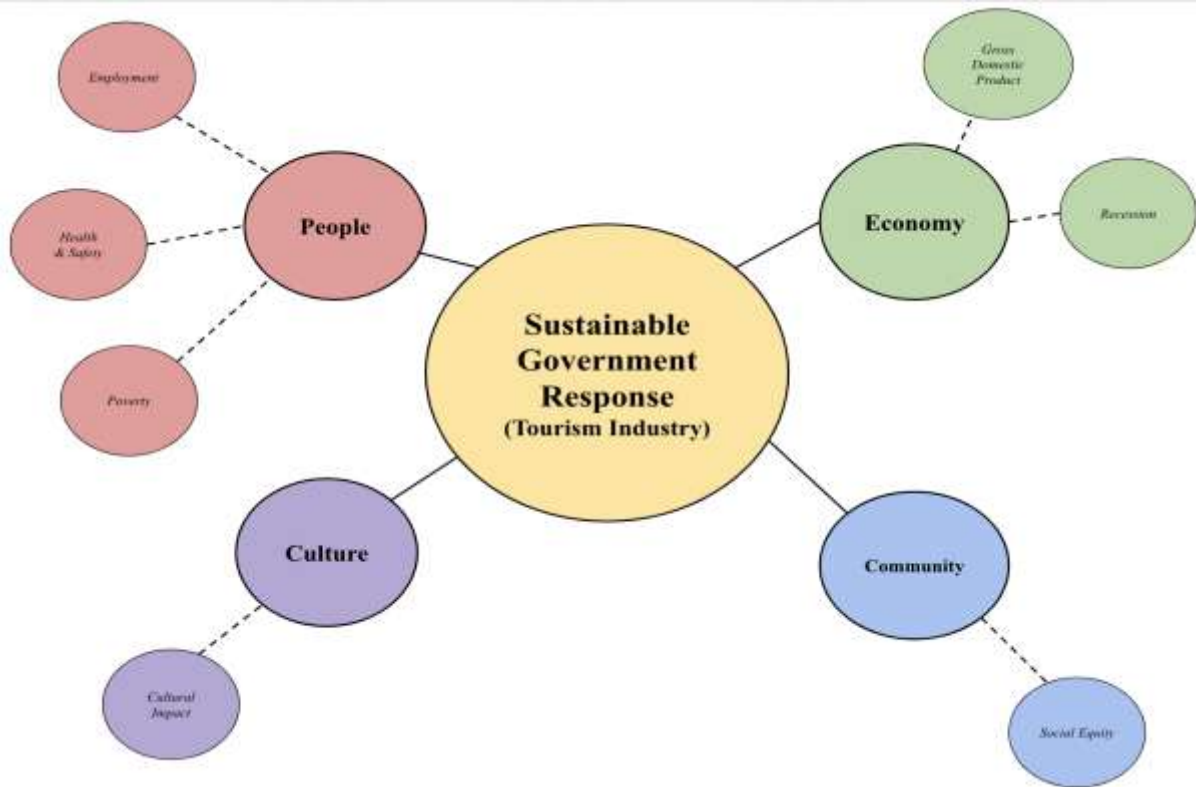
**Method:-**

It is evident that Covid-19 will eventually create a recession, and would affect the lives of the people. Tourism industry has been one of the strongest industries in the Philippines, contributing 12.7% of the Philippines’ total GDP. However, the fear of the Covid-19 and other government policies that restrict people from traveling are surely going to affect the tourism industry in an adverse way. Ever since 2015, there has been an increment in the number of visitors that have come to the Philippines. And in 2019, a total of 8,260,913 people visited the Philippines. But, the policies implemented by the government of the Philippines would restrict people from traveling to the country, which would not dramatically reduce the number of visitors that would visit the Philippines, but would also diminish the total GDP production of the Philippines. Then, if this is the case, how can the government sustainably maintain its operation of the tourism industry without worsening the situation of the Covid-19 in order to maintain the current economic growth.

Certainly, there are many things that the government must consider in order to attain sustainable operation of the tourism industry in the times of Covid-19. Moreover, in order to sustain the operation of the tourism industry despite the falling demands, not only is the government’s effort important, but the effort of the industry itself is also important. Thus, the coordination between the government and the industry is the most significant factor.

In order to assess how the government can sustainably maintain its operation of the tourism industry, this paper put together a framework that will assess the effectiveness of the policies that the government adopted in response to the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic.

**Figure 1:-** Sustaining the tourism industry during the pandemic framework.



The figure above is a framework that shows the criterias sustainable government responses should take in take a look at. In order for the government to come up with a sustainable policy that can invigorate the tourism industry, the government should have in mind of various aspects.

The framework is mainly composed of five distinct aspects, which constitute the *economy, people, community, culture, and debt*. These five parts are the most important areas that the government must consider whenever it

creates new regulations that can help mitigate the impact the pandemic would have on the tourism industry. Under these five parts are factors that determine the sustainability of the government response.

To assess whether the government response is sustainable or not, it is important for the government response to consider the community. Under the **community**, there should be *social equity*. Social equity refers to the idea that everyone is equal and is deserving equal rights (Mary et al, 2012). If a government response does not enhance social equity but exacerbates, it would not be regarded as sustainable; hence a government response should at least preserve the social equity that is prevalent within the nation. Nevertheless, social equity has a clear connection with the tourism industry. For instance, if a social inequity was to happen, wherein the distribution of income between the rich and the poor is uneven, there would be much more people that would not be able to afford tourism goods and services compared to those who can afford. As the number of poor far outstands the number of rich, more social inequity would mean that there would be an increasing number of poor. Hence, the demand for tourism would significantly decrease. Thus, it is important for the government response to maintain social equity during the pandemic in order to sustain the tourism industry.

In order for a government policy to be deemed sustainable, the policy should also take into recognition the economy of the country. Under the **economy**, there is *gross domestic product* and *recession*. To determine the sustainability of the government response, two questions are asked: “Does the government policy mitigate the loss of gross domestic product?” and “Would the policy worsen the recession?”. The sustainable government policy would certainly mitigate the decrement of gross domestic product and would not worsen the recession created by the pandemic. This has a huge relevance to the tourism industry. If a government policy does end up not mitigating the loss of gross domestic product, and as well as worsens the recession, the country and its citizens would get poorer (Danziger et al, 2012). This would lead to a downgrade of the tourism industry because since people are poorer, they would demand less of tourism related products and services, which would clearly negatively affect the tourism industry. Therefore, a sustainable government response must take into consideration its country’s economy whenever it is trying to sustain the tourism industry during the times of the pandemic.

Moreover, a sustainable government policy should take into account the people of the nation. Under the **people** there are *employment*, *health & safety*, and *poverty*. To find out whether the government response against the pandemic is sustainable or not, this time, three questions are asked: “How does the new government policy affect the employment status of the people?”, “Does the new government policy ensure the health and safety of the people?” and “Would the new government policy result in more poverty?”. So what is the relevance of people and community to the tourism industry? If the government response causes more poverty among people, this would lead to fewer people being able to afford quality education. In the long term, there would be fewer skilled workers who can work for the tourism industry, which would lead to a negative growth of the tourism industry. Moreover, if the government response causes more unemployment, this suggests that the tourism industry has been negatively affected by it. Recent studies have proven that the tourism industry has been employing more people, suggesting that its portion of employment in a country is significant (Delener, 2010). So, if there were to be an increase in unemployment, this would eventually mean that the tourism industry is employing fewer people, which indicates that firms involved in the tourism related businesses are shutting down and can no longer pay to afford employees. Furthermore, if the government response results in more poverty, this also suggests that the tourism industry is not operating efficiently. The Millennium Declaration of the United Nations has identified poverty alleviation to be one of the most difficult challenges that the world is facing. Hence, the tourism industry has played a big role in reducing the poverty alleviation through the foreign exchange earnings (World Tourism Organization, 2002). However, if the government response caused more poverty, this clearly suggests that it has restrained the operation of the tourism industry by not allowing foreign exchange earnings. Perhaps, this is why the government response should think about the people and community whenever it tries to sustain the tourism industry.

Another aspect of the sustainability framework is the **culture**, under which is the *cultural impact*. To determine whether the government response made against the pandemic is sustainable or not, one question is asked: “Does the government response intervene with the culture of the nation?” Some may question the relevance of culture and the tourism industry. Nonetheless, culture is one of the most important aspects that must be preserved in order for the tourism industry to bounce back. Inarguably, most tourists are persuaded to visit different nations for their unique cultures. Hence, “creating and exchanging information on tourism and culture was seen as a key need by many countries” (World Tourism Organization, 2018). Therefore, culture must be considered when the government is making responses in order to sustain the tourism industry even during the pandemic.

This framework can be applied to a specific government response, which in this case, is the Philippines. Truly, perfectly sustainable government response that the Philippines has made upon the outbreak of Covid-19 should integrate all these decisive factors. Nonetheless, it is really hard for a government to come up with a perfect response. Thus, in order to figure out which government responses are the most sustainable, the government responses are given a score based on the seven factors aforementioned. For instance, if a certain government response is able to perfectly ensure the health and the safety of the people, it would receive a mark of 5; however, if it isn't able to ensure the health and safety of the people at all, it would receive a mark of 1. In summary, the higher score the government response earns, it is regarded as more sustainable.

**Table 1:-** Assessment of the Philippines government response.

Government Responses:	People			Culture	Community	Economy		Total
	Employment	Health & Safety	Poverty	Cultural Impact	Social Equity	Gross Domestic Product	Recession	
₱ 3 billion TESDA free online upskilling courses for workers	5	5	2	5	1	4	2	24
Stimulus Package	5	3	3	5	3	3	3	25
Community Quarantine (Lockdown)	1	5	1	1	1	1	1	11
Emergency subsidy program	1	3	5	5	5	3	3	24

### **₱ 3 billion TESDA free online upskilling courses for workers.**

As of April 21, 2020, the government of the Philippines allocated a grand total of ₱3 billion for the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). This is surely a great contribution that the government made in response to the outbreak of the pandemic. When taking a look at all the factors mentioned in the sustainability framework, this government response would be very helpful for the employment, and health & safety of the people. However, it is somewhat questionable if it can alleviate poverty of the poor households. Evaluating this government response in terms of the economy, it is somewhat outstanding. As this would create more skilled laborers and workers, they would be much more efficient and productive, and would contribute a lot to the production of the gross domestic product. But, as the upskilling course is held online, it won't be as efficient as it was held physically. Thus, this somewhat hinders the learning of the laborers and workers, which would lead to not as much economic growth as it could. Furthermore, if this government response was to be evaluated based on the community criteria wherein it takes a look at social equity, this would certainly result in more social inequity. As this response is only valid to those who have access to technology and the internet, it certainly is not valid to those that are suffering from poverty as they do not have access to the internet. Hence, this response would simply make the middle to high income people richer while it makes the low income people poorer, which leads to uneven distribution of income. Lastly, evaluating this response in terms of the culture, this government response does not hinder nor intervene with the cultural diversity that the Philippines provide as it is just simply providing upskilling programs. Thus, considering all the aspects mentioned previously, this government response has scored 24 out of 35.

### **Stimulus Package.**

Recently, the Duterte administration announced a ₱27.1 billion stimulus package in response to the outbreak of Covid-19, and this stimulus package would surely have lots of positive effects. To the people and community, the stimulus package provides ₱2 billion subsidies for workers that have been affected by Covid-19. Moreover, the stimulus package also includes ₱1.2 billion to help those that are unemployed (unemployment benefits). So, this stimulus package is very helpful for both the employed people and unemployed people. Also, the stimulus package includes ₱3.1 billion allocated towards the acquisition of Covid-19 test kits. This would result in more hospitals having more access to test kits, which would also lead to better healthcare access for people. Looking at how this

stimulus package could contribute to lessening poverty, this stimulus package does not particularly make people poorer or richer; thus, it does not have a negative or positive impact. Looking at the economic impacts of this government response, as the government spends lots of money, there would be money circulating in the economy, which would lead to more gross domestic products being produced, which would mitigate the impact of the recession. Furthermore, this stimulus package also does consider the community to some extent; hence, not worsening the social equity. As this stimulus package is also for the small firms and not just for the big firms, it does not create social inequity where only one side gets all the privilege while the other doesn't. And discussing the culture aspect, the stimulus package does not have any negative impact on the culture of the Philippines; thus, would be regarded as sustainable. Therefore, considering all the factors this government response has addressed, it has scored 25 out of 35.

### **Community Quarantine (Lockdown).**

The Duterte administration declared a community quarantine in many areas of the Philippines in response to the Covid-19. The impact of this government response on employment, however, is deadly. As lots of stores have temporarily closed down due to Covid-19, they would be firing its employees as they are no longer needed. Thus, the lockdown would result in lots of people being unemployed. Good news, nonetheless, is that lockdown ensures the safety and health of the people. As people are restricted to leave their houses, there would be less interaction being made between people, which prevents them from transmitting Covid-19. So, this government response is beneficial for the health and safety of the people and community. But, this government response would surely result in more poverty. As poor people, who are involved in physical labor in order to earn income, are unable to work, this would make them poorer. And for the economy, as people are unable to work due to community quarantine, there would be less production of gross domestic products, which exacerbates the recession. Also, for the community aspect, as community quarantine would simply make those people poorer while those that are rich would not be impacted, this would clearly result in more social inequity. Finally, looking at the culture aspect, the community quarantine would have a devastating impact on the culture of the Philippines. One of the biggest cultural uniqueness of the Philippines is how it holds religious events, and such religious events are held in churches wherein it involves mass gatherings of people or simply requires people to visit churches. However, as the community quarantine restricts such movements, this government response negatively impacts such culture of the Philippines. So, taking all these into consideration, the community quarantine response has scored 11 out of 35.

### **Emergency Subsidy Program**

The government has launched a ₱205-billion emergency subsidy program in the target of 18 million low-income families who are desperately needing help. For employment, this government response would not have that much of an affect as it is not targeted to foster employment or anything. Looking at the health and safety factor, this emergency subsidy program would allow even the low-income families to have access to healthcare services. Thus, this government response does consider the health and safety of the people. For the poverty aspect, without a doubt, this government response would lead to less poverty as low-income families are now offered subsidies that can be used for their livings. And for the economy, as this emergency subsidy program allows low-income families to possess more disposable income, they would be spending more and would be able to contribute more to gross domestic production. This can help the economy escape the recession even by a little. Looking in terms of the community aspect, this government response would surely be helpful to maintain social equity. As this subsidy is targeted only to the poor people and is not targeted for the rich people, hence this can result in better distribution of income. Lastly, taking a look at the culture aspect, as this government response does not play a role in destroying the cultural heritage and such, it is deemed as sustainable. Therefore, based on these impacts, the government response of the emergency subsidy program has scored 24 out of 35.

### **Conclusion:-**

Thus, when comparing all the scores that each government responses have received, it is evident that the stimulus package is the best response compared to other major responses, as it scored 25 out of 35. And, the worst response that the government made is the community quarantine, also known as lockdown, as it scored only 11 out of 35. However, it won't be necessary to critique the government for its responses as it is surely the first time they have ever dealt with an outbreak of such disastrous pandemic. But, the Duterte administration surely should come up with a much more sustainable government response that can mitigate the impacts of Covid-19.