

KOMPAS, 29 June 2020

# Boosting the Health of Humans and Animals

Tri Satya Putri Naipospos Hutabarat is a combination of researcher, activist and bureaucrat. She has experienced being on top of each of these three fields.

29 June 2020 13:12 WIB



Tri Satya Putri Naipospos MPhil (left) receives a dedicated intellectual award during the 55th anniversary of Kompas Daily in Jakarta, Sunday (6/28/2020). The award was given by the Chief Editor of Kompas Sutta Dharmasaputra

Tri Satya Putri Naipospos Hutabarat is a combination of researcher, activist and bureaucrat. She has experienced being on top of each of these three fields. Nevertheless,

KOMPAS, 29 June 2020

her critical thinking makes her find more joy as animal health researcher and activist for the sake of human welfare.

For Tri Satya Putri Naipospos, 66, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought back memories of fighting the bird flu outbreak. The scales of the two outbreaks are very different but there is a connecting thread in our neglect of outbreak risks and our failure in early mitigation that results in the outbreaks' uncontrollable spread.

World Health Organization (WHO) data shows that Indonesia had the world's highest number of casualties from the bird flu, which was caused by the H5N1 virus. Since the first H5N1-related death was recorded in Indonesia in 2005 up to 2017, WHO data showed that 200 Indonesians had contracted the H5N1 virus, including 168 deaths.

Tri Satya, or Tata to her friends and relatives, served as animal health director at the Agriculture Ministry's director general of farming production when the bird flu outbreak occurred. The disease had actually entered Indonesia long before then.

"The bird flu probably got in Indonesia in mid-2003, when chickens began to die mysteriously. Incidents were covered up due to pressure from the poultry industry that was worried of plunging chicken and egg consumption," said Tata, who holds a masters of philosophy in veterinary epidemiology and economics from the United Kingdom's Reading University.

Tata, who completed her doctoral degree at New Zealand's Massey University in 1995, was appointed as animal health director on Dec. 24 2003. From day one, she was forced to face the realities of an uncontrollably expanding outbreak emergency.



Tri Satya Putri Naipospos-Hutabarat

KOMPAS, 29 June 2020

Throughout 2004, the situation became more chaotic. Hundreds of thousands of chicken died almost everywhere in Indonesia. Businesses wishing to salvage their poultry stock ended up finding their own vaccine supplies. Many brought illegal vaccines from China. Things were getting more chaotic by the day.

“The situation was similar to what we are facing today, even if [the COVID-19 outbreak] is more complex. If the bird flu jumped from birds to humans, COVID-19 jumped from animals to humans and then spreads between humans. When this disease first emerged in China, we should have been alert as we would surely have it sooner or later,” she explained.

However, similar to what we did during the bird flu, we tend to be dishonest.

“We have done this often. Regarding outbreaks in farm animals, other than bird flu, we also covered up the swine flu and the African swine flu outbreaks,” she said.

According to Tata, political and economic interests dominate far more than technocratic ones in outbreak mitigation. Consequently, scientific principles, including procedures to eradicate diseases, cannot always be enforced smoothly.

Funding is another issue. Of the Rp 212 billion (US\$14.95 million) bird flu mitigation budget that was approved by the House of Representatives, only Rp 84.6 billion was disbursed. It was only when the first human death from bird flu occurred in Indonesia in July 2005 that the House approved a budget increase.

Amid such a situation, Tata was abruptly dismissed from her position in October 2005. She was then reported for corruption in vaccine procurement. The corruption allegation that was made publicly by the Agriculture Ministry inspectorate general knocked Tata down. However, the allegation was never proven and no case ever went to court.

### **Interconnected**

As one door closed, a window opened. A month after her dismissal, Tata established the Center for Indonesian Veterinary Analytical Studies (CIVAS). The civilian body has the vision of achieving human health and welfare through boosting animal health.

KOMPAS, 29 June 2020

“Ensuring animal health is fundamentally ensuring human welfare and protecting the ecosystems of animal habitats means protecting ourselves. A collection of different viruses will always circulate in populations of animals and wild animals. Preventing such viruses from making the jump to humans can save the state economy and human life,” Tata explained.

Tata’s knowledge and experience in tackling outbreaks were constantly sought after. When the Office of the Coordinating People’s Welfare Minister established the National Committee for Bird Flu Control and Preparedness for Influenza Pandemics (Komnas FPBI) in March 2006, Tata was appointed as deputy chief executive.

Once again, she was faced with the complications of bureaucracy.

“Our bureaucracy is highly top-down and deeply feudal. Clashes will occur if we prioritize science. However, one important experience that I gained was that we are often overwhelmed by outbreaks as we do not have adequate resources,” she said.

### **Capacity building**

Learning from the bird flu, Tata said Indonesia should have prepared itself by boosting laboratory infrastructure as well as capacities for diagnostics and surveillance. People’s skills must also be increased in the long run.

“Pandemics will reoccur and zoonoses have killed millions of people in the last two centuries. We have to be prepared,” said Tata, who is now a senior executive at the Indonesian Veterinarians Association (PDHI).

Our constantly changing political orientation in line with changes in national leadership also poses a problem. In 2010, Komnas FPBI was disbanded and replaced with the National Commission for Zoonoses Management. However, in 2016, President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo disbanded the commission that was tasked to monitor the spread of diseases from animals to humans.

KOMPAS, 29 June 2020

After serving for 18 months at the Komnas FPBI, Tata decided to take a consultancy job at the World Animal Health Organization for Southeast Asia, the office of which is in Bangkok. Next, she served as Country Team Leader for Laos at the Emergency Centre for Transboundary Animal Diseases (ECTAD), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Outside of work, Tata still researches and writes. She has published eight articles in international journals, excluding her pieces in domestic journals. She has also written books and more than 10 proceedings papers. Furthermore, she also educates the public through her writings in mass media.

Most recently, on June 18, her opinion article on the “one health” concept was published in *Kompas*. Global activities are in line, with the concepts of human, animal and environmental health be dependent to one another.

In these concepts, health workers collaborate to provide health services and understand the factors of disease spread and ecosystem health. There are efforts to achieve better global health through risk prevention based on the interconnected of humans, animals and the environment.

Learning from previous pandemics, Tata said Indonesia should change and prioritize prevention, mitigation, risk reduction and science, especially on matters related to public health.