

Lessons Drawn from Vietnam's Success in COVID-19 Fight

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Abstract: The paper explores lessons and the possible ways to control the Covid19 pandemic in Vietnam. It focuses on an integrated approach to fight fatal disease, includes the extensive use of tracing, testing, and treatment (T3). They have a strategy slogan like Leave no one left behind and adopted a multi-sectoral response plan. The Vietnam government has provided personal protective measures for frontline warriors and subsidy for poor people's livelihoods.

Keywords: Covid19, pandemic, preventive and controlled measures, and success.

INTRODUCTION

Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2 is the causative agent of the 2019 novel coronavirus disease pandemic, which originated from Wuhan in China and has now spread to 6 continents, including more than 214 countries. A coronavirus is a group of viruses categorized into alphacoronavirus and betacoronavirus, often causing cold and other mild upper respiratory tract infections in the human body Lal [1].

According to the WHO report dated 7 July 2020, the coronavirus COVID-19 has affected 213 countries and territories, with a total of 11,500,302 confirmed cases and 535,759 deaths. The cases started to climb in the South-East Asia Region with a total of 974,389 confirmed cases and 25,619 deaths, and there is a need for a more robust whole-of-society approach WHO [2].

The first case of COVID-19 in Vietnam was declared on 23 January 2020, when a man from Wuhan (China) passed the coronavirus to his son in Vietnam. A COVID-19 nationwide epidemic was declared in Vietnam in early April, MoHoV [3].

Thanks to drastic measures put in place, the novel coronavirus epidemic has been brought under control in Vietnam with 369 cases. No deaths have been reported so far. Vietnam is among very few countries globally that have recorded the lowest infection rate within the community.

However, there is no room for complacency as the pandemic is evolving in a complex manner, regionally and globally. Vietnam has gone through more than 70 days without new, locally transmitted infections, but the risk remains high. The government has maintained the closure of its borders for foreigners since March, except for specialists, business executives, and highly skilled workers, as well as Vietnamese nationals stranded abroad who desire to be repatriated back to the home country.

METHODS

This particular paper followed a qualitative research method narratives integrated into the form of a white paper. We have report results from various policy documentations and reviews from time to time in Vietnam. These were obtained through the analysis of a database of WHO, policies, official press coverage from the Ministry of Health,

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reports, and credible data sources in Vietnam. A systematic approach to analysis was used to identify the emerging lessons, which then informed the structure of the reported results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

With the motto "fighting the epidemic as an enemy," Vietnam has mobilized the participation and the whole political system and entire people, as well as social resources, to fight COVID-19 pandemic.

Fighting the Epidemic as an Enemy

Vietnam activated its response system very early, utilizing an integrated approach to fight fatal disease. This included the extensive use of tracing, testing, treatment (T3) and, isolation together, with enforcing policies, enhancing community education, increasing social resources, and encouraging positive community behavior. COVID-19 became the Vietnamese government's top priority, and the whole political system joined entire people in combating the epidemic.



Fig-1: Military forces are mobilized to lend a helping hand to local people during social the distancing period

Leave No One Left Behind

The Prime Minister and Health Minister have made several vital messages towards COVID-19, such as fighting the epidemic, is like fighting an enemy, and the government is willing to sacrifice economic benefits in the short term for the health of the people and work with principles that do not leave anyone behind. These messages invoked the whole nation to be ready to combat the COVID-19, HLN [4].

Multi-Sectoral Response Plan

Vietnam's national steering committee for COVID-19 prevention control was established promptly and developed a multi-sectoral response plan. Vietnamese government made an unequivocal decision to prioritize health over economic growth, "fighting the epidemic as an enemy" NSCV [5].

Vietnam adopted and strictly implemented a Multi-Sectoral Response Plan to coordinate and control pandemic with every ministry under the guidance of the Taskforce Group. Vietnam's national steering committee for COVID-19 prevention control communicated carefully with the Ministry of Health (MOH) on disseminating information from the beginning DGV [6]. The MoH and government's website and open TV channels provided daily updates on positive cases globally and in Vietnam, and conveyed MOH health messages to prevent and control COVID-19, to large audiences VoV [7]. The broadcasting of specific new cases on national TV, and their related epidemiological information, allowed high-risk groups to be traced all over the country when many citizens returned to Vietnam from Europe and the United States. The repeated communication on the prevention of COVID-19 (wearing masks, hand washing, and social distancing), and the promotion of stay home and keep a distance from others at 3 m minimum, helped change people's behavior toward the epidemic more seriously. Transparent information on positive cases helped to convey the image of government action towards COVID-19. Furthermore, the Ministry of Health created an official account on social media (Zalo), sent SMS to all citizens, and changed waiting for ringtones to a voice message to remind about COVID-19 protection measures, Ha *et al.* [8].

Since late March, selective travel bans have expanded in Vietnam to include the suspension of entry for all foreigners. Self-reporting app has been launched, while quarantine has also been applied to large communities where confirmed cases were detected.

Vietnam successfully developed a COVID-19 test kit in March for the broad screening of suspected cases. Vietnam has also conducted free testing for entrants at airports and required mandatory health declarations for all incoming travelers as well as residents.

Several field hospitals have been set up to prepare for an increase in cases. Innovation has been utilized to drive the development of robots that can disinfect rooms and transfer supplies to isolation wards. Local people are asked to strictly follow the World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations and medical agencies' advice.

In particular, a 15-day nationwide social distancing effort, which began on 1 April, has proved positive results. City-wide lockdown scenarios were also planned but have not yet been implemented.

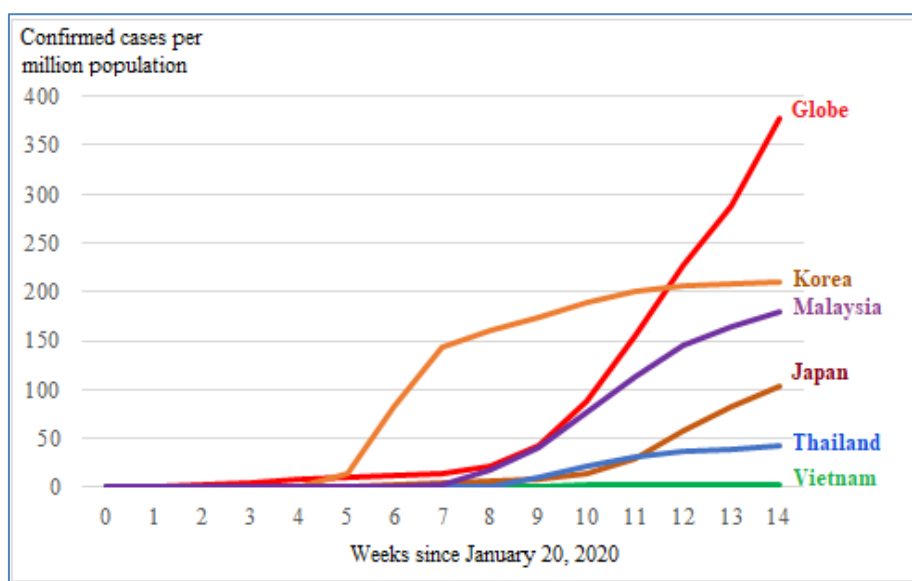


Fig-2: Prevalence of COVID-19 infections in Vietnam and selected countries in Asia. Source: World Bank, Fact on Covid19-2020

Personal Protective Measures and Subsidy

The Ministry of Health informs the public of positive cases and potential exposures and has provided guidelines for disease prevention on its websites. A government-run media campaign, including a viral music video, has promoted personal protective behaviors. In contrast, public and private telecom companies have collectively sent billions of messages on COVID-19 prevention to mobile phone users.

Services of Retired Persons: The government of Vietnam mobilized retired doctors and nurses and medical students to join the fight against the virus, they rendered services at their level best.

Wearing face masks is mandated in public places, and alcohol-based hand sanitizers are widely available. Religious sites and schools have been closed for three months. Schools nationwide closed temporarily, while factories shifted their focus to manufacturing medical supplies, helping the health system avoid shortages of personal protective equipment and ventilators. “Rice ATMs” were installed to feed vulnerable people amid pandemic and in the face of an economic slowdown.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Vietnam has so far only had more than 300 cases of COVID-19, with zero fatalities. The country has gone through nearly 70 straight days without new infections in the community, while imported cases were immediately quarantined for 14 days upon the arrival.

Notably, the British pilot (patient No.91), the most severe case in Vietnam, is expected soon to leave the intensive care unit for functional rehabilitation. More than 300 patients have fully recovered and have been discharged from the hospital, making up 93.7% of the total. The remaining 22 cases are receiving treatment at hospitals in stable health condition. Six of them have tested negative for the SARS-CoV-2 virus at least once.



Fig-3: British pilot (patient No.91), the most severe case in Vietnam, almost fully recovered

Despite initial success in the combat against COVID-19, Vietnam's National Steering Committee for COVID-19 Prevention and Control has requested that epidemic prevention and control agencies across the country move to heighten their vigilance against a potential second wave of COVID-19 that is still severe in many countries around the world.

Past Experience

Although it's markedly approached, Vietnam shares some essential characteristics that have shaped its responses. Vietnam was among the hardest hit by the SARs outbreak in 2003 and was determined to better prepare for the next pandemic. The government is highly centralized, unified, and well organized. Vietnam's "culture of surveillance" is highly effective in monitoring and communicating with its citizens. This system has a public that is broadly accepting or at least accustomed to this level of intrusiveness.

DISCUSSION

According to current regulations on COVID-19 prevention and control, all foreigners or Vietnamese nationals on repatriation flights are placed in quarantine for medical observation as soon as they land in Vietnam. Therefore they generally pose no risk to the community. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that a small number of people try to cross the land border into the territory unchecked. The fact is that over the recent week's several people have managed to enter Vietnam from epidemic hit countries like China, Cambodia, or Laos through open border crossings or paths without checks. However, they were later forced to present to local authorities and be quarantined at concentrated quarantine facilities. Fortunately, subsequent tests showed they were SARS-CoV-2 free.

There is no denying that alongside preventive measures, wearing a face mask is considered an effective way to keep the virus at bay, and Vietnamese people are now more aware of the need to don a face mask when they are out in public. The Ministry of Health has found in its recent survey that most of the coronavirus patients in Vietnam were those who had close contact with or did not wear a face mask.

However, there has been a widespread apathy among the public since the epidemic has been kept under control in the country. Many people are seen not wear a face mask when they leave home for outdoor activities. That Vietnam has gone more than 70 days without locally transmitted infections does not mean the epidemic has been completely stamped out. Therefore, Vietnamese people must be highly vigilant against any recurrence of the virus as it has been seen in several countries in the world. In other words, wearing a face mask when going out remains an effective way to prevent the virus from spreading throughout the community until Vietnam is declared virus-free.

Last but not least, public consensus plays a significant role in combating the COVID-19 epidemic. The recent past shows that the fight against COVID-19 has received strong support from people of all social strata, and actually, it has not achieved initial success without public participation. Besides medical workers and soldiers who were on the front line during the fight, Vietnamese people, regardless of their social status, age and sex, have joined hands in containing the epidemic. Despite that fact, a small number of people refuse to cooperate with relevant agencies, barring epidemic containment efforts. Also, the communication role should be enhanced to raise public awareness of the danger of the virus as well as preventive measures to nip in the bud the possible recurrence of the virus in the community.

CONCLUSION

Vietnam continues to implement measures to restrict the spread of this dangerously infectious disease, with the help of all people on the control and personal security initiatives. In this paper, we have summarized the on-going experience in reducing the spread of COVID-19 in Vietnam. The Vietnamese response is characterized by fighting the epidemic as an enemy, a Multi-sectoral response plan, and Personal protective measures and subsidy, experience supported by clinical care, and public health response.

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