

The fight against Covid-19 in Vietnam





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In 2020, Vietnam was hailed as a success story in containing the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite having a long border and thriving bilateral trade with China, Vietnam recorded a relatively small number of infections and a negligible amount of death. Specifically, by early May of 2021, Vietnam just reported under 4,000 infections and 35 deaths (Johnson, 2021). And this success in the fight against Covid-19 was reflected clearly in economic results, when in 2020 Vietnam was the only economy in Southeast Asia that experienced positive economic growth (Abura, 2021). These good results could be attributed to a few reasons. First, Vietnam's government responded proactively to prevent the outbreak even before it recorded its first case, with its primary strategy being to suppress the pandemic as quickly as possible. Secondly, the government successfully mobilized the population's support, as people were willing to follow strict social distancing measures imposed when necessary. All residents in Vietnam have gotten familiar with a state-led motto, "fighting the pandemic is like fighting against the enemy".

However, the development of the Delta variant in 2021 completely changed the situation as Vietnam has been hit severely. According to Vietnam's Ministry of Health, as of September 10th 2021, there have been 589,417 confirmed cases of Covid-19, including 14,745 deaths. And this sharp increase of infections has been bringing about many problems for Vietnam. First of all, the health care systems in some Covid-19 affected areas, such as the biggest city of Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh, have become overwhelmed. Moreover, although poor people in the Covid-19 affected areas have been hit the hardest, the government has been relatively slow to respond to their demand. Also, the complete lockdown in affected swaths has caused disruptions in the supply chains of essential goods, especially the food chain. Not only have these disruptions adversely affected people's lives, but they have also caused economic losses. As a consequence, some international organizations have already lowered their forecasts for Vietnam's economic growth in 2021.

The issues mentioned above are rooted in both objective and subjective reasons. From the objective perspective, there are two main reasons: (1) the Delta variant is much more contagious than earlier forms and (2) the vaccination rate in Vietnam is low due to a lack of Covid-19 vaccines. However, Vietnam's government

could have dealt with the current outbreak better if they had taken better policy responses. Particularly, the government should have secured contracts for the Covid-19 vaccine more quickly and aggressively, which could help increase the national vaccination rate and partly prevent the quick spread of the Delta variant. Furthermore, the classification of Covid-19 patients based on their health status should have been done better and sooner because this could have helped reduce the burden on the health care systems in Covid-19 affected areas. This means that Covid-19 patients who are asymptomatic or have mild symptoms should have been instructed to get home treatment earlier. This could partly help reduce the death rate of Covid-19. Moreover, when imposing complete lockdown orders, the government should have prepared better plans to help the poor in urban areas and guarantee their basic needs. Lastly, the strategy to cope with the Delta variant should have changed sooner, shifting from trying to suppress the outbreak at any cost to adapting and coexisting with Covid-19.

Up to now, there have been positive signals that Vietnam could contain this current fourth wave of Covid-19 pandemic soon, considering the vaccination rates across the country have been improving significantly the last two months. This substantial increase in the national vaccination rate derives from the government's determination to get Covid-19 under control as quickly as possible. Moreover, the government has gradually changed its strategy, focusing on finding ways to adapt and coexist with Covid-19. Most important of all, the population in Vietnam always rallies behind the government in the fight against the pandemic, which is the most important requisite for overcoming this challenging period.

In conclusion, the fight against Covid-19 in Vietnam allows us to take two main policy lessons, applicable for any government in this ever-changing world. The first one is that a government needs to be more flexible in planning strategies for coping with challenges, and the second one is that the support of the people is the key to the success of any policy.

Reference

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