

Citizen's social responsibility - an important factor in the prevention and control of the Covid-19 epidemic in Vietnam

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Abstract: *The Covid-19 pandemic has hit Vietnam severely, both in economic and social aspects. The Government of Vietnam has led the fight with the motto "Fighting the nCoV- caused disease is like fighting enemies", mobilizing the central and local governments, the healthcare system, and people of all classes for the epidemic prevention and control. The strategy has received active advocacy. Each individual's social responsibility to protect themselves, families and communities from the disease, among others, has been of great significance. Based on a literature review, the article analyzes some dimensions of people's social responsibility in the fight against the epidemic, thereby drawing implications on promoting the citizen's role during the hard times of the country.*

Keywords: Covid-19 Prevention and Control, Social Responsibility, Citizen, Vietnam

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic, after two years of strong outbreaks in China and subsequently in other countries around the world, is the biggest global challenge since World War II, said the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres (2020). It also has negatively hit Vietnam in terms of economic and social aspects: business shut-downs, an increasing rate of unemployed and underemployed persons, salary cuts, the severely affected healthcare, and education (See: VCCI and WB, 2021; UN, 2020; WB, 2021; Ngoc Quynh, 2021).

How to solve the problems caused by the Covid-19 pandemic challenges the entire political system in Vietnam. People as affected subjects but at the same time responders to the Covid-19 pandemic, so their active participation in the epidemic prevention and control is of great significance. A study by the Department of Agriculture and Forestry Extension (1998) suggests that those affected by the Covid-19 pandemic are the ones who better understand its consequences, and at the same time they will be the ones who promote wisdom and understanding to

effectively respond to epidemics. This approach requires each person to be a responsible citizen to join hands with authorities at all levels in the epidemic prevention and control while promoting each individual's intellectual and material potential and his/her participation in overcoming this challenge.

From the sense of community, traditional Vietnamese culture emphasizes the organic connection between human rights as members of the community and the rights of the community (May, 2020). It is in challenging situations that people's sense of community will be promoted, motivating them to act together to overcome difficulties. With the motto "fighting the nCoV-caused disease is like fighting enemies", the Party and State have mobilized the participation of governments at all levels and social classes in the disease prevention and control for nearly two years. The government has sacrificed short-term economic gain in exchange for the health and safety of its people. After the initial phase of effective control of the Covid-19 pandemic, Vietnam now embraces the new normal, focusing on economic recovery and development while keeping being cautious in epidemic prevention and control.

Vietnam's two-year experience with Covid-19 shows that the citizens' social responsibility can be considered a spiritual vaccine. However, while the socio-economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic in Vietnam have been popular studies, its citizens' social responsibility has not been fully analyzed. The paper attempts to partially fill that gap by applying a participatory approach and a

sense of community, based on a literature review to analyze some aspects of people's social responsibility in their responses to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The social responsibility of citizens during the Covid-19 pandemic is reflected in their positive responses to livelihoods; their active participation in general activities of society and community; their attitude and trust in the general direction of the Government; and the reorganization of life in a way that is suitable for the new context. These will be covered in the following sections.

2. Citizens' positive responses to livelihoods

Research by the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) and the World Bank (WB) (2021) shows that most businesses have applied one or more measures to minimize the negative impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, including up to 92% of private businesses. Next was the proactive implementation of new and more flexible working methods and models (37% of private enterprises). Some enterprises have been looking for new/alternative supply chain solutions (16% of private enterprises). From the third wave of the epidemic (from January to March 2021), the application of digital technology has helped farmers in Hai Duong province approach a new consumption method, which is to put agricultural products on sale on e-commerce platforms. Difference from the usual "support" way, the application of technology to sell agricultural products directly from farmers to consumers through e-commerce platforms (for example, Voso.vn) has opened up a sales method, carrying out digital transformation for each farmer

household to cooperatives, fundamentally change the thinking in production, distribution, and retail, thereby improving product quality and production stabilization (Nhat Anh, 2021).

As global tourism is almost frozen, many families in the travel service business have turned to investing in alternative livelihood models. Community groups are formed to help each other in production recovery (Action on Poverty in Vietnam, 2020).

3. Citizens' participation in epidemic prevention and control activities through social and community organizations

On March 17, 2020, at the launching ceremony of total support for the Covid-19 prevention and control organized by the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Vietnam Fatherland Front, Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc called on every citizen to uphold the spirit of solidarity, mutual love, "loving others as you love yourself", "the intact leaves cover the tattered ones", to the fullest extent possible, to contribute in cash and in-kind, ideas and energy to the work, regardless of age, status, and class. Then, on March 30, 2020, General Secretary and President Nguyen Phu Trong called on the entire people to unite to defeat the pandemic. Several organizations, businesses, and individuals, from the elderly to children, responded to the Party and the State's calls with meaningful actions to enhance material and spiritual power in the fight against the epidemic. Immediately after the call of the Prime Minister and the Central Committee of the Vietnam Fatherland Front, the cash and in-kind donations by agencies, units, organizations, businesses, and individuals

at home and abroad reached nearly 2,000 billion VND (Ha Mai - An Yen, 2021). Besides, several poems and songs expressing gratitude and praise to the medical staff, army soldiers on the front lines against the epidemic, and songs and dances to promote the spirit of the whole people have been released, for example, the global hit "*Ghen Co vy*"¹.

Citizens have actively participated in the Covid-19 prevention and control under the direction of the Party and the government. Other forms of charity include the "Free Rice ATMs" deployed in several localities to provide free rice to families in difficulty due to job loss and income loss during the period of social distancing. The models of "Happiness Store", and "Zero Dong Store"... have been opened in urban to rural areas. Thereby, thousands of tons of rice, and millions of tons of agricultural products and food have reached the poor (Institute of Labor and Social Sciences, 2020).

These meaningful actions of the people, from children to the elderly or famous people, have not only shown their small effort to share with the people but also created a positive effect of lighting up

¹ See: Lam Ngoc (2020), "The song "*Ghen Co Vy*" won the first prize at the "Vietnam - Unforgettable days" award ceremony", *Nhan dan online* dated 26 December 2020, <https://nhandan.vn/dong-chay/ca-khuc-ghen-co-vy-gianh-giai-nhat-tai-le-trao-giai-vietnam-nhung-ngay-khong-quen-629576/#:~:text=Ca%20kh%C3%BAc%20%E2%80%9C%20Ghen%20C%C3%B4%20vy%20%2D%20V%C5%A9%20%C4%91i%E1%BB%87u%20r%E1%BB%ADa%20tay%E2%80%9D,nh%E1%BA%ADn%20m%E1%BB%99t%20c%C3%A1ch%20n%E1%BB%93ng%20nh%E1%BB%87t>, accessed on 31 May 2021.

the fire of love in the community to fight the epidemic together. A significant contribution to the “people’s war” against the Covid-19 epidemic in the past two years must include tens of thousands of Covid-19 community aid groups. They function as a bridge between local authorities and the health sector and the people, actively monitoring and communicating proactive epidemic prevention and control to each household (VH, 2021).

The vast majority of Vietnamese consider patriotism as an essential “spiritual medicine” for each person to have more motivation to overcome difficulties and tribulations. People in localities across the country have volunteered to fight against the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, the third outbreak of epidemics in two provinces of Hai Duong and Quang Ninh has made thousands of hectares of vegetables and fruits unable to be consumed during the harvest and at risk of having to be dumped. Thanks to solutions from the authorities as well as many organizations and unions, farmers received active support. Various individuals and volunteer groups have connected with agricultural cooperatives, purchased agricultural products in epidemic areas, and then transported them to food rescue locations in Hanoi (Chuong Phuong, 2021).

The Covid-19 pandemic provides an opportunity to show family bonding; love between people and promote good traditional values such as patriotism and mutual affection. Supporting and helping each other such as sharing jobs, food, and essential supplies have increased community cohesion. The spirit of

solidarity and encouragement for each other in disease prevention and control is also promoted, including sharing information and knowledge or providing support to people in difficulties (Institute of Labor Science and Social Affairs, 2020). A woman in Ho Chi Minh City confessed that since the epidemic became stronger, every weekend, their family decided to spend part of their money buying food to cook meals of gratitude for people in need in the ward (According to Hong Giang, 2021).

The fact that people actively support in kind and cash as individuals or through organizations for Covid-19 prevention and control activities in Vietnam shows that civic responsibility has been strongly promoted in the difficult times of the country.

4. Citizens’ trust and voluntary compliance with the Government’s policies

In difficult times due to the Covid-19 epidemic, every single Vietnamese unanimously and voluntarily follows the Government’s message of being “willing to sacrifice some economic benefits to protect people’s health and lives” and “leaving no one behind”.

The Covid-19 pandemic has made people more aware of personal responsibility to family and community, actively preventing and fighting epidemics. The majority of people showed that they feel calm and completely secure, and support the State’s policies in realizing the dual goals of disease prevention and control and economic development. The survey results show that the majority of young people interviewed feel more proud because

Vietnam has a suitable strategy to deal with the Covid-19 epidemic, thereby promoting patriotism and a more responsible life (cited by Hang and Anh, 2020). Some young people in Ho Chi Minh City regularly connected with the Youth Union of local wards and districts to support jobs that can be done via the Internet such as data entry, order processing for the “Go-to-market program”, etc. (Hong Giang - Thu Hoai, 2021).

Moreover, people actively call upon others' trust and compliance with the government's measures to prevent and control the Covid-19 epidemic through direct or indirect communication (including social networks). During the early period of the Covid-19 pandemic, many people were overly worried after the first cases of infection, which led to a lack of cooperation in medical declarations, avoidance of quarantine, holding a discriminatory, insulting, alienating attitude, etc. at various levels in social life. Due to a lack of knowledge, some individuals took advantage of the epidemic to distort, fabricate and give false information, leading to false rumors in society about the epidemic situation in localities, which affects the psychology of patients and their families and causes confusion in the community and society. However, the Government's propaganda measures plus the people's active calls for compliance with the Government's decisions have helped stabilize social order and security in difficult times. For example, when the Government issued regulations on social distancing, the slogan “Stay at home is patriotic” was widely spread in many forms.

They also participate in communication activities, disseminating information, preventing rumors and Covid-19 fake news, especially the implementation of the 5K Message (Khẩu trang: face masks; Khử khuẩn: disinfection; Khoảng cách: distancing; Không tụ tập: no gatherings; and Khai báo y tế: health declaration) and other medical messages afterward.

People's high consensus has facilitated the Covid-19 prevention and control. The cases of regulation violation are insignificant and are condemned by the public.

5. Changing behaviors and habits to adapt to the requirements of epidemic prevention and control

Many people have actively adjusted their living habits to minimize the impact of the Covid-19 epidemic on their lives, “converting” inconveniences during the time of social distancing into opportunities to promote family bonding. They tend to start slow living, refuse to play, gather outside, only eat in, entertain, and relax with family and loved ones in the house. Instead of going out, many young people turned to their families, helping, confiding, and caring more about their parents, etc. (Institute of Labor and Social Sciences, 2020). From a positive perspective, this is an opportunity for family members to get closer together.

The Covid-19 pandemic has also changed people's shopping and spending habits positively. Various forms of online commerce are promoted. Instead of going to the market or going to the store in person, many people have chosen to shop online. E-commerce is positively evaluated by the majority of consumers because it

not only saves time but also limits contact with large numbers of people, which is the basis for promoting the digital economy in the coming time. The World Bank (2021) said that about 10% of respondents started shopping online for the first time from February 2020 (also around the time when the Covid-19 epidemic first broke out).

Although online teaching, learning, meeting, and working still face many difficulties both in terms of technical infrastructure and people's awareness and determination in updating how to use new technologies, families are more aware of the need to apply technology to adapt to new life. Many people have taken full advantage of social networks to improve their knowledge. The requirements on the Covid-19 prevention and control also helped improve people's ability to use social networks in their lives. A survey by UNDP in July 2021 showed that 30.9% of households used the nCovy or Bluezone app as a way to update the number of cases of infection with close contact (cited by: Ngoc Quynh, 2021).

A male civil servant shared that every day, he always allocated his time reasonably, if not working online, he attended online courses to hone his expertise or learn new initiatives in his field (Hong Giang - Thu Hoai, 2021).

Many couples have a lot of time together, sharing about life. Despite the complicated development of the Covid-19 epidemic, it is an opportunity for many people to change their habits and learn to adapt to the times of distancing, such as organizing birthdays online, door-to-door delivery, indoor exercise, etc.

In sum, self-adjusting habits, living and working styles to adapt to and "live together" with the Covid-19 pandemic have been identified as a necessary, long-term, persistent, and drastic measure for each family and the whole society, that also shows people's active social responsibility in disease prevention and control.

The social logic behind people's social responsibility is the traditional sense of community, which is promoted in the new context to create favorable conditions for people to effectively participate in the Covid-19 epidemic prevention and control process. The active role of socio-political organizations and the community, people's initiative in livelihoods and life organization, their attitudes, and responsibilities in complying with the Government's directives, and their affection towards other members of the community and society attests to this. It is the consensus and participation of the people that is the basis for the concentration and unity of power, so that collective efforts and actions benefit the community.

6. Conclusion

Over the past two years, Vietnam has achieved initial success in the prevention and control of the Covid-19 epidemic, thanks in part to the people's active social responsibility. Vietnam has overcome a new and greater challenge in the new period with the strategy of "safely, flexibly adapting to and effectively controlling the Covid-19 pandemic" to "maximize people's health and life; minimize cases of infection and cases of severe disease transfer, the mortality rate due to Covid-19

epidemic; socio-economic recovery and development, ensuring security, social order, and safety; realize the dual goal of transitioning to a new normal...” (Government Resolution No. 128/NQ-CP dated October 11, 2021). This strategy emphasizes the mobilization of all forces and classes in society, promoting the role of people and businesses as the core and subject in the Covid-19 prevention and control as well as in the production, business, and safe living. In other words, further promoting the social responsibility of the people is one of the basic factors for the success of this new strategy.

The above analysis can draw some initial implications about the role of citizen participation and social responsibility in the fight against Covid-19 in Vietnam as follows:

(i) Vietnam has well-promoted citizens' social responsibility, a high consensus in society to take strong measures to respond to the epidemic, and mobilized great resources in a short period for epidemic prevention and control. The efficiency of Covid-19 community-led aid groups partly contributes to limiting the spread of the Covid-19 epidemic.

(ii) The official communication systems and forms of social networking have been well coordinated to provide accurate information to the people, and help them understand and trust the Government's decisions, thereby promoting their participation, active response, and consensus in epidemic prevention and control.

(iii) The sense of community, which upholds common interests and emphasizes

the joint effort and consensus of the whole community for a common purpose, is an agent to encourage people to actively prevent and control epidemics. That is manifested in their strict adherence to the Government's decisions, proactively and voluntarily performing various jobs to participate in common activities. The moral virtues for the community, mutual affection, love, sharing, and mutual care, which were formed throughout the historical tradition, have continued to be promoted in the new situation. It reveals that community values would be crucial in building a common institution, ensuring common interests and a consensus rather than personal values.

(iv) People's trust in the Government's actions and policies ensures a united bloc to respond to common challenges, which is not easily formed without a factual basis. Every decision of the Government for the people's benefit and its timely, flexible, and effective responses during the recent epidemic prevention and control period has been the basis for people's trust, support, and consensus.

(v) Citizens' social responsibility in epidemic prevention and control has contributed to promoting the strong digital transformation process. Therefore, digital transformation in education and health services or promoting the digital economy and economic development needs to be studied systematically to make the best use of its positive aspects and the people's social responsibility in the coming period.

Although the Covid-19 epidemic has been a threat of great harm in many aspects of society, it is also a test of the government's ability to respond and operate and each

citizen's attitude and bravery. Vietnam initially controlled the epidemic to stabilize society and develop the economy. The people's and community's active involvement contributes a large part to this success. These experiences will certainly help Vietnam achieve greater achievements in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic shortly □

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