



How Can Private Resources Help Society in a Health Crisis? Evidence from Vietnam

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Dear Editor-in-Chief

In a dangerous and on-going pandemic, as usual, the governments put the people's health first and accept enormous economic losses. Centralized resources such as public budget are important to protect the community during a health crisis, however, urgent and strong solutions have been adopted by governments that spent many public resources. Unfortunately, public budgets are not sufficient to cope effectively with a prolonged crisis, especially in developing countries (1). The COVID-19 virus is causing 21.6 million infections and 769 thousand deaths globally (2). Besides the public resources, governments need to mobilize robustly private resources to not only fight the epidemic but also support vulnerable groups. Social resources are very helpful in the case of a health crisis, however, due to ownership characteristics; the mission to convince private resources is not simple.

Many countries in the wealthiest group are struggling to control well this pandemic. How can poor and developing countries with limited resources put the pandemic under control? Having a small number of infected cases (below 1000 cases) from the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak to date (3), obviously, the Vietnamese approach offers useful insights (Fig. 1).

Like many developing countries, to combat a pandemic like COVID-19, the efforts from the Vietnamese government through the public budget are not sufficient to solve fully the socio-economic problems. Obviously, the sharp increase in public spending has increased the financial risks on the national budget that has been faced with a prolonged deficit. To share the financial burdens with the national budget, private resources have been mobilized and well contributed to society during the past four months in Vietnam. The Vietnamese private sector has done many charity activities to help the community with private resources in Vietnam.

First, private resources have been widely mobilized by contributing to national charities with cash and essential products, besides; private charities have been blossoming during the pandemic. People can easily access and directly donate by a variety of channels such as mobile-phone messages, online newspapers, daily papers, national televisions, and national multi-media channels. In the case of Vietnam, private resources have come not only from domestic regions but also from the overseas Vietnamese community. The national relief fund has been operated with huge contributions from the private sector.



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Second, private sponsors have flexible actions to help disadvantaged people by free distribution of essential foods. To facilitate the allocation, "ATM-rice" machines have been invented and replicated throughout the provinces in the coun-

try (5). Through private resources, free food distribution activities have enabled disadvantaged people to maintain their lives during the social distancing period.

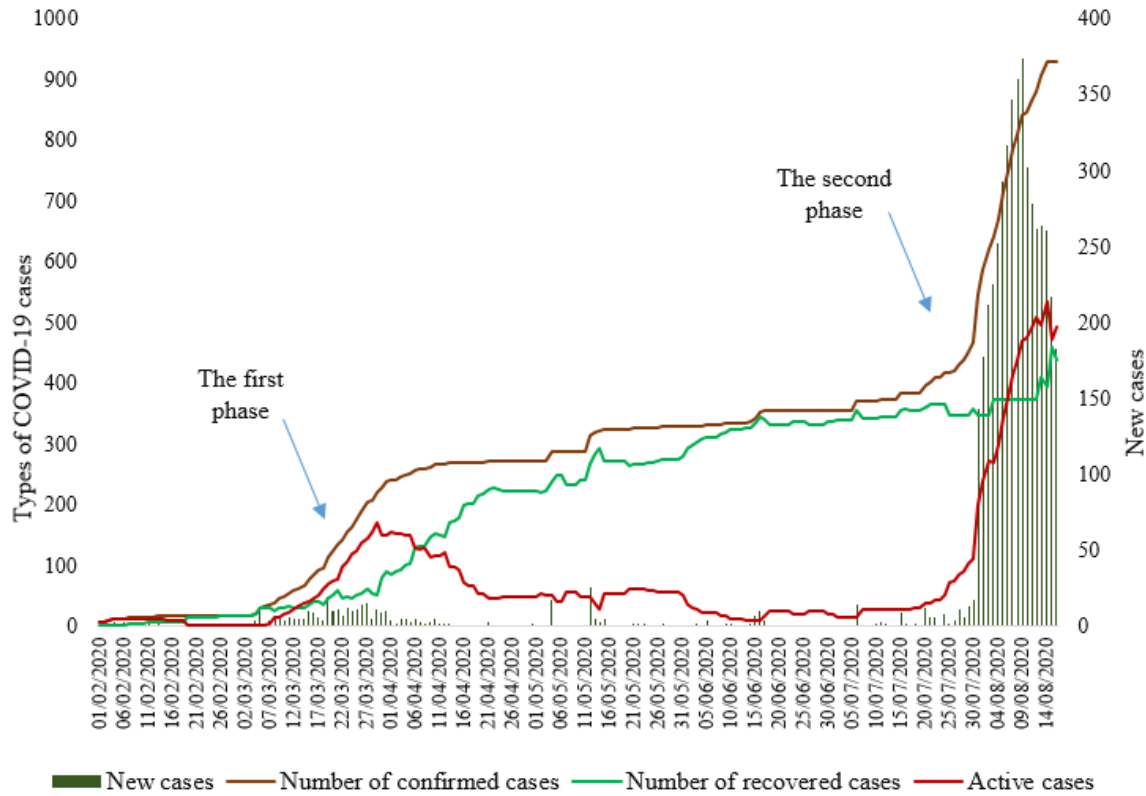


Fig. 1: The COVID-19 situation in Vietnam. Source: Author’s elaboration based on the statistics of the Vietnam Ministry of Health (4)

Third, as a developing country, the health care system of Vietnam has faced with the lack of medical equipment (e.g. ventilators) and the lack of personal protective equipment (e.g. masks and gowns) for people at the beginning of the pandemic. Private businesses have rapidly researched and manufactured health products that help to prevent the epidemic. Domestic factories have shifted their operations to manufacturing medical supplies (e.g. fast virus testing tools and ventilators) and helping the health system avoid shortages of personal protective equipment. Besides, private businesses were also widely involved in the production and export of disease prevention

products such as facemasks and health-protective clothes.

Fourth, the COVID-19 research projects also were received grants from domestic private scientific research funds (6). All the financial funding will be used by the groups for research and producing test kits for disease diagnosis, researching treatment regimens, manufacture of vaccines, research on the epidemiological characteristics, viral characteristics, and transmission ability.

From the experiences of Vietnam, there are some policy implications for increasing the role of private resources in social crises as follows.

- Government's messages and public communication are very important. The slogans of governments toward the private business community must be done from the beginning of the campaign. The transparency of national action plans to respond to the crisis needs to be consistently implemented.
- The solutions activate private resources must be diversified and easily accessible in order to maximize the available resources of this sector. A national master plan is needed to promote the participation of private resources in social activities.
- The 'heroes in action' need to be highlighted and encouraged in the community and strongly spread to society. Propaganda measures are important to replicate effective models of private resources in support of disease prevention.
- Promulgate public policies to encourage business activities regarding corporate social responsibility through volunteer activities to create self-awareness of the private sector with the community. The charity activities of private companies need to honor in order to help increase the reputation of their businesses.

In conclusion, public resources are not enough to cover all social costs in a pandemic like COVID-19. Measures to mobilize private resources are essential to overcoming and blurring the negative consequences of the crisis. This study emphasized the role and effectiveness of private resources in supporting society to combat the COVID-19 epidemic in Vietnam.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

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