

Public trust and confidence underpin success in government's COVID-19 responses

Ha Noi, 7 December 2021 – The COVID-19 pandemic has been causing more severe impact in 2021 than in 2020. Citizens showed great concern about their personal health (68% of the respondents) and their children's education (76%). COVID-19 has had created negative impact on employment and income, with 77% of respondents reported income reduction, especially for the poor, ethnic minorities, unskilled, non-agricultural self-employed laborers, those work in the service sector and those living in longer lockdown periods.

These are among the key findings of the sociological survey: "Citizens' Opinions of and Experiences with Government Responses to COVID-19 Pandemic in Viet Nam: Findings from 2nd Round Phone-Based Survey, 2021". The survey was conducted by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the Mekong Development Research Institute (MDRI), with the support and partnership from the Australian Government's Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

Citizens' assessment of government response showed high but declining positive assessment of government performance in handling the pandemic from 2020, with 84% of the respondents rating the responses from the Central Government as good or very good (compared to 97% in 2020), 89% rating the response from their provincial governments' responses as good or very good (94% in 2020). Citizens showed strong support for strict containment measures; less support for closing open markets and schools.

On the accessibility and effectiveness of the Government's 26 trillion VND cash aid package, the survey showed that the proportion of people receiving the aid package was low. The poorer had less access than the wealthier. Information about the aid package not well provided for more disadvantageous people. Ethnic minorities, rural and poor people were less likely to know about the package than others. For those who have received the cash aid, delivery was regarded as timely and as informed, but administrative procedures to get access to the cash aid package was not simple.

In the meantime, electronic public administrative services not yet utilized during the 4th wave. Many still had to submit COVID-19 test results to be admitted to healthcare facilities. One of the key issues that the Viet Nam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index or (PAPI) has pointed out over the past decade has been the suboptimal performance of public hospitals at the district level which are now an important element in the response to the public health crisis.

The survey also reflects citizens' preference and expectation. Despite significant economic impacts, most respondents clearly prioritized health over economy. As many as 83% of the respondents agreed that "The government's highest priority should be saving as many lives as possible, even if it means the economy will sustain more damage and recover slowly".

"The Vietnamese experience has demonstrated to the world that public trust and confidence underpin success in government responses." said UNDP Resident Representative in Viet Nam **Caitlin Wiesen**. *"The year 2022 is coming with unforeseen challenges ahead of us because the pandemic is still with us and surging in many parts of the world. But with the fast and impressive delivery of COVID-19 vaccination in Viet Nam in recent months, together with citizens' support for mask mandates and the Government's agile responses, I believe that Viet Nam is well positioned to overcome the pandemic challenges and to recover soon".*

Moving forward, the survey suggested that:

- Citizens' feedback and preferences on crisis responses are important for the government to review solutions moving forward.
- Aid packages should target the poor, the unskilled and seasonal laborers, those working in the service and tourism sectors.
- Community-based support and support from NGOs, social organizations and charity groups and individuals and during the pandemic and similar crises should be appreciated and recognized formally. Simplification of administrative procedures for cash aid packages will make the aid timelier accessed.
- E-public services should be reassessed and upgraded to be more user-friendly for higher utility of contactless means to interact with the government

Ms. Cherie Russell, Development Counsellor, Australian Embassy Viet Nam: *"Through these survey results, we have an important opportunity to hear the voices and experiences of Vietnam's citizens. This evidence then informs policy decisions and builds more trust within communities for the delivery of these policies."*

Using the Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI) method, this intensive telephone survey was conducted from 17 September to 15 October 2021 with the participation of 1,501 respondents randomly selected from the 2019 population sample of the Viet Nam Provincial Governance and Public Administration performance Index (PAPI). The aim was to compare views and experiences of permanent residents in all 63 provinces in 2021 with those in 2020 to understand changes before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr. Phùng Đức Tùng, President, Mekong Development Research Institute: *"This is very timely and important survey that could provide a clear picture about experience, major concerns of households during the lockdown time and the efficiency of the government interventions and policies. The survey results are the guidance for designing the better interventions and policies for the future pandemics"*

Link to the presentation in English and Vietnamese:

<https://www.vn.undp.org/content/vietnam/en/home/library/PAPICOID.html>

The full report to be published in January 2022 and will be posted at

<https://papi.org.vn/eng/thematic-research-reports/>.

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