



3rd Vanuatu Health Research Symposium
26-28 October 2022
Luganville, Santo, Vanuatu

The Missing Cog? -Synchronizing the Cogs of Multi-Sectoral Operation in Vanuatu during an ever-changing Health Pandemic in 2020-2022

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Abstract

Background: In early 2020, the novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (WHO) resulting in immediate protective action from countries across the world.

Methods: Following the lead from many neighbouring Pacific countries, the National Disaster Management Office declared a State of Emergency in March 2020 and implemented border measures such as restriction of travel to citizens only and a requirement of < 14-days quarantine on arrival in order to protect and prevent the importation of the infectious SARS-CoV-2 virus into Vanuatu.

Results: The first phase of the travel restrictions and the repatriation of stranded Vanuatu citizens was conducted in March-June 2020 and concluded with an after-action review (AAR) conducted in July 2020. Findings from the AAR indicated that coordination between all government departments, partners and key stakeholders involved in all the repatriation processes (pre-arrival, arrival, quarantine, monitoring and testing, isolation) needed better alignment and strengthening of coordination in order to improve operational outcomes. As a result, the missing cog was created, a Multi-Sectoral, Inter-Agency Coordination focal point to bring together and strengthen the operation as part of the Vanuatu Government's preparedness to respond, contain and protect the country from any possible imported cases.

Discussion: The missing cog provides the lessons learnt from the coordination of quarantine in Vanuatu during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to build awareness and strengthen preparedness between all stakeholders in the event of further global public health emergencies.