

National Governance And Requirements Of Organizational And Operational Innovation Of Commune-Level Authorities In Vietnam

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ARTICLE INFO ABSTRACT

My article proposed proposals to innovate the organization and operations of commune-level government (commune, ward, town) to best respond to the reality of social development. Research on the organizational structure and operating mechanism of local government, especially at the grassroots level, often called commune-level government, which is in dire need of innovation consistent with modern management. effective according to the new public policy and public administration research method based on the research of Harold Lasswell, and David Easton and later developed by many scholars. Developing modern and effective national governance requires mobilizing the active participation of the people, high accountability and transparency in the management activities of government agencies, Optimize the resources of the state and social community to meet the increasingly diverse needs of the people, satisfying them. Listening to people's opinions with an open mind, promptly resolving people's complaints and frustrations, and ensuring fairness and legality are also considered criteria to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of operations. Commune-level government action towards modern, effective national governance.

Keywords: National governance; Commune-level authorities; The People's Council; The People's Committee; Vietnam.

1. INTRODUCTION

Local authorities in countries around the world are organized by their political institutions and cultural and ethnic development history, thereby creating unique features in their national governance. In Vietnam, local authorities, in addition to being organized according to general principles consistent with democratic trends, are also featured in their way, with a certain flexibility, by their historical development and local and regional culture within the territory.

Local authorities of Vietnam are statutorily divided into 3 levels: provincial level, district level, and commune level [VNA, 2013], including 63 provincial authorities (provinces and municipal cities); 705 district-level authorities (districts, towns, provincial cities, cities of municipal cities); 10.599 commune-level authorities (communes, wards, commune - level towns) [GSO, 2023]. The authorities of each locality are the People's Council and the People's Committee. The People's Council is the state power agency, established by voters to carry out supervision activities for local agencies and organizations. The People's Committee is the state administrative agency, established by the People's Council at the same level to perform governance tasks of local economic and social activities [VNA, 2015]. There are specialized positions for civil servants according to responsibilities assigned by the People's Committee at the commune level such as Commander of the Commune Military Command; Clerical – statistics civil servants; Cadastre - construction - urban and environment civil servants (forwards and commune - level towns); Cadastre - agriculture - construction - urban and environment civil servants (for communes); Finance and accounting civil servants; Judicial - civil status public servants; Social and cultural civil servants [VG, 2023].

In the 3-level local authority system, the commune-level authorities account for a large number of

administrative units, are responsible for regularly resolving citizens' requests, and are known as the grassroots agencies. The efficient, streamlined organization and operation of commune-level authorities has a great impact on the effectiveness of state policies and laws; great significance for consolidating the sustainable development of the society, ensuring democracy, and improving the people's lives. This creates favorable conditions and premises to achieve the goal of modern and efficient national governance in Vietnam.

In fact, besides the stability, there have been issues in the organization and operation of commune-level authorities in Vietnam that need to be improved, especially in rural areas with unique features of self-governance; meanwhile, national governance activities at the local level have not yet met the increasing and diverse needs of the people. Therefore, the organizational and operational characteristics of commune-level authorities in Vietnam in the context of national governance towards modernity and efficiency are chosen as specific and typical research subjects in this study.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF NATIONAL GOVERNANCE IN VIETNAM

In Vietnam, participants in national governance include the state and the people. Theoretically, the people's participation in state management can be seen as either direct or indirect participation in organizing and operating the state apparatus [Trung, N.S., 2019]. In essence, it is the participation in managing activities in case the use of state power is not required or the state power is not effective enough to thoroughly solve the problem. According to Giao,

V.C. (2019), in national governance, the people are both subjects and objects of management; have the right to give comments and evaluation of the efficiency in organizing and operating the state apparatus as well as civil servants' working performance. At the same time, the people also have the right to make recommendations and suggestions to state agencies on building apparatus and developing strategies, programs, and plans for economic and social development in their locality.

In practice, the innovation of local authorities towards modern and efficient management will have a strong impact on changing the entire state apparatus because local authorities, especially those at the commune level, are associated with each specific area, in charge of performing decentralized functions and tasks but in a self-governing and self-responsible manner. Moreover, local authorities are also the institutions that ensure that state policies and laws are into practice and make them applicable to specific circumstances in each locality, which helps the state intervention become the most practical and effective; thereby, avoiding bureaucracy in the management and operation of state activities in the locality. Besides, the commune-level authorities are considered to be extended arms of the state apparatus to the grassroots as well as the determining factor for the people's trust and confidence in the state. Accordingly, governance innovation at the commune level is necessary for local authorities to meet the increasing and diverse needs of the people; at the same time, national governance innovation must also ensure unity and synchronization from central to local levels, among levels, branches, and fields.

To ensure consistency in viewpoints, thinking, and action, sets of indicators to evaluate governance efficiency and administrative reform, local authorities of Vietnam have developed component criteria closely related to the goals of governance activities. For example, the Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI) for the provincial authorities was developed to evaluate the governance efficiency of the local administrative agencies. Among the component criteria, PAPI proposed evaluation criteria for the people's participation in localities, focusing on determining the efficiency of local authorities in mobilizing the people's participation. From this, the mechanisms to create favorable conditions for the people to participate in public administration and governance processes are evaluated. The main issues mentioned here are the people's understanding of their participation opportunities, experiences in electing village chiefs/resident group leaders, satisfaction with the election for the positions of village chief/resident group leader as well as mobilization of voluntary contributions from the people for public works projects of communes.

National governance implemented in localities is also associated with the requirement for principles of transparency in providing information from local authorities to the people. This refers to the people's awareness as a result of local authorities' provision as well as publicity of information about social policies for the poor, legal regulations on the people's daily lives, commune-level budget revenues and expenditures, and land use planning and compensation price frames for recovered land. However, the people's participation and dedication in state management depends on different factors, such as the people's willingness, the form of participation (direct or indirect), working capacities and job positions, factors belonging to individuals (human capital - personal values, cultural, social, politic, and financial status, and information accumulation, etc.), and especially institutional factors, state policies. National governance in localities toward modernity and efficiency is both a target and a task set in the new social context. This is one of the major policies oriented by the Party, setting out objective requirements for innovating governance institutions, thinking, awareness, positions, and roles of related participants, as well as an inevitable requirement for the development of the whole country in general and localities in particular.

a) National governance towards modernity

National governance towards modernity refers to the application of inventions, the latest achievements of science, technology (digital technology), and achievements of the 4.0 revolution into national governance,

such as the Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), 3D printing, biotechnology and nanotechnology, etc. [Dang, N.V., 2021]. These are technologies that bring great value in supporting the creation of highly realistic and highly effective strategies, policies, and legal systems in national governance. According to Chien, N.B. (2021), thanks to digital technology, implementers of national governance in localities can promptly make governance decisions, issue policies, and use resources more rationally and effectively; fully provide essential and basic public services to the people in time, bringing satisfaction to the people; attract the people and businesses to participate more in national governance to create high values, benefits, trust and consensus in the society.

In localities, modern and efficient national governance is associated with criteria for evaluating governance efficiency and local administrative reform index in modernizing the administration with specific requirements [Giao, V.C., 2019]. The trend of modernizing the administrative system has increasingly received attention from local authorities, which has changed and directly impacted the efficiency of governance. In recent years, the implementation of modernizing the administrative system in localities has achieved certain results. Positive changes in the administration modernization in localities, especially the application of information technology to provide online public services, have directly impacted the social and economic development of localities [Hanh, N.H., 2021]. Accordingly, thinking of high efficiency and e-governance methods is formed to keep up with the social development trends.

b) National governance towards efficiency

Efficient national governance associated with evaluation criteria of planning, and organizing the implementation of strategies, policies, laws, and use of resources must ensure efficiency in both quantitative and qualitative terms. According to Phuong, N.T. (2018), policies and laws developed and promulgated must truly be practical and useful tools for national governance as well as create resources and competitive advantages for the development of the economy and society. Evaluating the quality of promulgation and organization of policy and law implementation in localities also needs to be considered in terms of uniformity, reasonableness, feasibility, and timeliness of legal documents applied within the locality. In addition, Giao, V.C. (2019) affirms that efficient national governance is reflected in closely following the change of thinking in environmental governance. This means that the exploitation, the use of natural resources, and the setting of local economic and social development goals are inseparable from environmental protection and sustainable development. Although the role and importance of environmental protection are clearly aware of and this has been much mentioned in guiding documents as well as management documents, it was not until 2018 that a component index on local environmental governance has just been added into Vietnam's PAPI index. The component index particularly refers to the strict compliance of local authorities and businesses with environmental protection, especially air and water environment.

The trend of local governance towards modernity and efficiency is inseparable from the goal of bringing satisfaction to the people. In other words, the ultimate goal of modern and efficient national governance is to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of governance to meet the requirements of national construction and development, bringing satisfaction to the people, organizations, and businesses. Accordingly, the improvement of local civil servants' and officials' professional behavior and working performance plays an important role. National governance in localities towards modernity and efficiency is an inevitable trend. However, there are still problems that need to be improved in the process of innovation. For example, the adjustment of the current administrative apparatus towards streamlining, effective, and efficient operation has not been much carried out; The overlaps in functions and tasks among departments, divisions, and local authorities at different levels have not yet been answered.

D.X. (2021) emphasizes the principle that one agency takes the main responsibility of implementation for one task has not been effectively applied, so there is coordination and meetings carried out but not efficient enough, leading to inefficient working processes; the functions, tasks, and organizational models of local authorities follow decentralization and authorization mechanisms but can't be built up into a synchronous and thorough system; organization and operation of professional agencies at the provincial and district levels have not been improved well enough to be flexible and consistent with local characteristics. Besides, Chien, N.B. (2021) also confirms the reality that civil servants' professionalism and innovation in thinking and working methods are improved at a slow pace; there are localities that neither have kept up with the modern development trend nor have built the essential infrastructure to carry out better governance and online public services equivalent to the requirements of level 3, 4; hence, strong transformation, especially at the commune level has not been created.

It can be said that national governance tends to attach importance to the role of the state as a system of controlling social relations and executing decisions and policies. Issues related to multi-subjects and the participation of non-state sectors in the management process of social development have also emerged, but the organizational model, operating mechanism, and nature of the relationship among those subjects is still a question that has not been clarified. The institutional conditions for a multi-subject governance system, cooperation, and joint action towards common values have not received much attention, which can be seen as limitations that need to be overcome. Currently, innovating national governance towards modernity and efficiency is also associated with innovating the state operation, based on using the latest methods and achievements of modern science and technology, especially information technology and digital technology to

achieve the set goals, fulfill assigned functions, and tasks of national governance, create favorable conditions and competitive advantages to develop the national economy and society rapidly but sustainably and serve people better.

3. DISCUSSION ON INNOVATING ORGANIZATION AND OPERATION OF COMMUNE-LEVEL AUTHORITIES TO MEET NATIONAL GOVERNANCE REQUIREMENTS IN VIETNAM

The organizational innovation of commune-level authorities is determined to include innovations in organizational apparatus towards streamlining, effectiveness, and efficiency, at the same time, by the actual situation [VG, 2021]. Along with the trend of modern, efficient national governance, the operational innovation of commune-level authorities consistent with the organizational innovation is in demand to ensure the following requirements: guarantee, promote human rights, citizenship and encourage the people's participation in state management activities; ensure publicity and promote government accountability.

a) **Guarantee, promote human rights, citizenship and encourage the people's participation in state management activities**

- Firstly, it is to ensure equality to all individuals and organizations (state, political organizations, social organizations, etc.) in enjoying and promoting their rights, without discrimination, first and foremost in participating in state and social management. Being citizens of a socialist and law-abiding state, all Vietnamese are equal before the law [VNA, 2013]. This means that the state establishes institutions that ensure all state and social institutions, collectives and individuals, do not (and cannot) require things out of the scope prescribed in the Constitution and law in general. Hence, this poses a requirement of an executive institution that exists and operates as a unified, mutually binding body and the implementation of the law which is guaranteed by an independent court system. The citizens, thereby, will be guaranteed to have competence and conditions to resist the arbitrariness or abuse of power by government agencies; create a strict mechanism to check the constitutionality and legality of laws and management activities, including the activities of the legislative and executive apparatus formed in terms of organization of the apparatus, issued legal documents and civil servants' working performance.

- Secondly, it encourages active participation of the people in the local economic and social development of communes. Despite governance thinking towards the multi-subject participation in different fields of localities, the people's participation plays a decisive role in ensuring the effectiveness of policy implementation. The government's mission is to encourage and create conditions for the people's participation stemming from their responsibility, awareness, and understanding of the community, society, and themselves, which is meaningful to the local authorities of communes with high self-governance. The nature of mobilizing the people as active participants demonstrates democracy in the state agencies' activities. When the people participate in local governance activities, solutions to economic and social issues will ensure harmony in the rights and responsibilities of relevant parties, putting maximum restrictions on manifestations of individual and group interests. This is also to raise the people's law-abiding spirit and to solicit their new and breakthrough initiatives and ideas for local development. To mobilize the people's active participation, commune-level authorities must diversify methods and tools to attract the people's participation, and then, build up trust and responsibilities from the citizens in the area.

b) Ensure publicity and promote government accountability

To achieve the goal of modern, efficient national governance, the requirement is to develop and apply mandatory standards for the evaluation of commune-level authorities' performance, referring to publicity and accountability in the authorities' activities. Publicity and transparency can be best proved when the authorities ensure their public duty performance is based on the law-abiding principle. This, at the same time, means that the process of planning and implementing policies and laws must comply with the provisions of law and be evaluated according to criteria recognized by law. Modern and efficient management thinking also requires commune-level authorities to take advantage of means and forms, especially those associated with the development of science and technology to provide information to all subjects related or interested in the organization and operation of the authorities.

Publicity and transparency of commune-level authorities will minimize questions and frustrations from the local people and organizations; reduce complaints and lawsuits; build the people's trust and create the people's satisfaction from the grassroots. When people have complete access to information, especially information related to sensitive issues such as investment, land, social security, etc., they will more actively build a better life and more contribute to the community and society. In this way, publicity and transparency in the operation of commune-level authorities are also to verify the reasonableness of state policies and laws as well as of the policy and legal system associated with the rights and interests of the people.

Publicity and transparency implemented will meet the needs and satisfaction of the people. The measure of effectiveness and efficiency in local authorities' operations is the people's satisfaction. Efficiency in local authorities' operation is not only linked to the implementation of local economic development goals but also must go hand in hand with social efficiency. Accordingly, each issue regulated in policies and laws must

receive consensus from the community; Public service must meet the diverse and increasing needs of the people. For commune-level areas, the government's service to the people must be direct and specific because the people's material and spiritual life as well as understanding of policies and laws is still at a low level compared to the national average. Therefore, to satisfy the local people, the commune-level authorities must change their manner and attitude while serving the people, that is, the people are considered as the major concern in working performance, and serving the people becomes the target duties.

No matter how reasonable policies and laws are, the policy and law implementers are under the required standards, and the people's trust in the entire political system can't be created. The commune-level authorities are both the executive bodies and the state agencies whose civil servants directly communicate and provide public service to the local people. In addition to providing public services and serving the people, commune-level authorities must also demonstrate efficient governance through their competencies of receiving, processing, and resolving feedback and recommendations from the people. Listening to the people's opinions with open-mindedness, resolving the people's complaints and frustrations timely, and ensuring fairness and legality are also considered criteria to ensure effectiveness and efficiency in the operation of commune-level authorities towards modern, efficient national governance.

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