



Effectiveness And Efficiency Of Grassroots Government Operations In Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

Local authorities in various countries exhibit unique traits shaped by their political systems, historical trajectories, and cultural contexts. Consequently, a range of organizational and operational models exists worldwide, including self-governing structures, hybrid models combining elements of deconcentration and decentralization, and dual supervision frameworks. Given the distinctive organizational and operational characteristics of Vietnamese local authorities, this study proposes innovative recommendations to enhance these models in line with the country's political institutions, historical development, cultural nuances, and social progress. Utilizing secondary data analysis and case study methodologies, this research examines the commune-level governance within Vietnam's three-tier government system (provincial, district, and commune levels), providing insights into the organizational and operational dynamics of Vietnamese local authorities.

Keywords: Effective, efficient; Work; Grassroots government; Vietnam.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Vietnam, the concept of locality encompasses a structured system comprising three administrative tiers: 63 provincial-level units (including provinces and municipal cities), 705 district-level units (comprising districts within provinces and cities, towns, provincial cities, and municipal city districts), and 10,599 commune-level units (encompassing communes, wards, and commune-level towns) (GSO, 2023). These local authorities are organized within these three tiers, each equipped with governmental bodies such as the People's Council and the People's Committee. They administer state affairs with a dual approach, combining sectoral management with territorial governance as mandated by law (VNA, 2015). This implies that while local authorities exercise oversight over all facets of society within their jurisdiction, they are subject to supervision and regulatory compliance by central sectoral management agencies (ministries, ministerial-level bodies) in their respective fields.

Vietnam's three-tier local governance system adheres to consistent principles: the People's Council serves as the legislative body, elected by constituents; the People's Committee functions as the administrative body, established by the corresponding People's Council; the People's Council issues resolutions to govern matters within local purview and oversees the implementation by the People's Committee; the People's Committee executes these resolutions and adheres to legal directives from superior state bodies for local social management.

Within this tri-level system, commune-level authorities constitute a significant portion of administrative units, responsible for addressing citizens' needs regularly and serving as grassroots agencies. Consequently, considering the distinct organizational and operational characteristics of Vietnamese local governance, the commune-level authorities are chosen as specific and representative subjects of study in this research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Grassroots-level civil servants

Communes, wards, and commune-level towns, collectively referred to as commune-level authorities, constitute three distinct types of administrative units recognized by law with equal legal standing. Notably, differences exist among communes, wards, and commune-level towns in Vietnam, which merit discussion in this study.

A commune serves as a rural administrative entity outside the urban cores of municipal cities, provincial cities, and towns, overseen by local authorities, namely the Commune People's Council and the Commune People's Committee. Inhabitants of communes foster a sense of community, residing in households characterized by close-knit relationships in labor, production, daily life, and social activities. Communal living areas are delineated by geographical, economic, and social factors, alongside cultural traditions and customs. Economically, communes primarily engage in agricultural activities, utilizing natural resources like houses, gardens, ponds, and fields, often in conjunction with local geographical conditions.

Contrastingly, a ward stands as an urban administrative unit situated within the urban cores of municipal cities, provincial cities, districts, and towns. Managed by grassroots authorities People's Council and the People's Committee-wards exhibit markedly different demographic, economic, and socio-cultural characteristics compared to communes. Wards are densely populated and diverse, characterized by highly educated citizens and economies predominantly driven by trade, services, and handicrafts. Functionally, wards serve as administrative centers and hubs of service, culture, industry, handicrafts, technology, and scientific innovation within their respective districts, towns, or provincial cities.

Furthermore, commune-level towns represent another administrative unit at the same level as a commune. These areas predominantly focus on trade, services, and handicrafts, typically classified as class-5 urban areas. Commune-level towns function as general or specialized centers for politics, economics, culture, and services, facilitating the economic and social development of districts or sub-regions therein. Notably, the proportion of non-agricultural workers in commune-level towns exceeds 65% of the total workforce. These towns are categorized based on their location and function into district towns, center towns of service and economic activities, and satellite towns, each playing distinct roles in regional development.

Commune-level local authorities operate at the grassroots level within the national government's administrative framework, tasked with managing administrative territories and addressing local issues. Legally recognized by the Constitution and Vietnamese laws, commune, ward, and commune-level town authorities consist of two agencies: the People's Council (representing state power) and the People's Committee (responsible for state administration). Their organizational structure and operation are tailored to the specific characteristics of their respective localities.

In summary, commune-level authorities, comprising communes, wards, and commune-level towns, constitute a network of state agencies entrusted with exercising state power within defined administrative boundaries. Despite their shared organizational structure, differences among communes, wards, and commune-level towns arise due to their distinct characteristics and functions within their local contexts.

2.2. Legal basis for grassroots government operations in Vietnam

a) *Organizational characteristics of commune-level authorities*

Commune-level authorities operate within a legal framework (VNA, 2015), adhering to four key principles: Compliance with the Constitution and laws, ensuring society is managed by legal provisions and the principle of democratic centralism.

Emphasis on modernity and transparency, with a focus on serving the people's interests and being subject to their supervision.

The convening of People's Council sessions to make decisions through majority voting.

Operation of the People's Committee under a collective working system, coupled with the accountability of the Committee Chairman.

At the commune level, governance is structured around the People's Council and the People's Committee. Tasked with representing the will and aspirations of the local populace, the People's Council serves as the state power agency within communes, wards, or commune-level towns. It is elected by and accountable to the local community and higher-level state bodies. On the other hand, the People's Committee functions as the executive arm of the People's Council at the same level and serves as the state administrative agency within these administrative units.

Within the organizational framework of the People's Council at the commune level, there exist the Standing Committee, council divisions, and elected delegates. Delegates, whose numbers are dictated by law, are chosen by voters from communes, wards, or commune-level towns. The Standing Committee comprises a Chairman, a full-time Vice Chairman, and divisional Heads who oversee various council divisions such as Legal and Socio-Economic. Each division is led by a Head and Deputy Head, with divisional membership determined by the People's Council.

Conversely, the organizational structure of the People's Committee at the commune level encompasses the Chairman, Vice Chairman(s), Military Commissioner, Police Commissioner, and civil servants. The number of Vice Chairmen varies based on the classification of commune-level administrative units. The Chairman leads the implementation of committee activities to achieve set goals, while Vice Chairmen are individually assigned

responsibilities in sectors like Economic-Financial or Cultural-Social. The People's Committee typically comprises 3 to 5 members, including the Chairman, 2 Vice Chairmen, and other members. Each member bears individual responsibility to the Chairman and collective responsibility to both the People's Council at the same level and higher-level state bodies. Various specialized positions, including Commander of the Commune Military Command and Clerical-Statistics Civil Servants, exist to fulfill specific tasks within the committee's purview (VG, 2023).

b) Characteristics of grassroots government operations

Commune-level authorities operate to ensure stable and sustainable development within communes, wards, or commune-level towns. This operational process, outlined by Thu (2013), is characterized by regularity, constant engagement with social movements, and the application of sectoral and territorial management principles. It is also guided by the functions and responsibilities mandated by law (VNA, 2015). Specifically, these include implementing and upholding the Constitution and laws, making decisions within decentralization boundaries, executing duties authorized by higher-level state administrative agencies, and being accountable to superior state bodies for task outcomes. Moreover, commune-level authorities are tasked with promoting citizens' rights to participation, mobilizing social resources for economic and societal development, and ensuring national defense and security within their jurisdictions.

The People's Council in communes, wards, or commune-level towns bears specific duties and powers, including making resolutions on assigned issues, conducting elections and dismissals of council and committee officials, approving economic and social development plans, supervising compliance with laws and resolutions, and taking confidence votes for elected officials, among others. They also possess the authority to dismiss delegates and annul illegal documents issued by the People's Committee and Chairman of the People's Committee at the same level.

Conversely, the People's Committee at the commune level is responsible for developing and submitting local issues for council decision, executing council resolutions, managing the local budget, and implementing decentralized duties and powers delegated by higher-level state agencies

** The operation of the People's Council at the commune level*

At the commune level, the People's Council serves as both the representative body of the people and the state power agency in communes, wards, and commune-level towns, carrying out essential functions. These include convening sessions to make resolutions, conducting supervisory activities by reviewing reports and holding meetings with voters, and collaborating with the People's Committee, the Fatherland Front Committee, and social-political organizations to effectively execute resolutions and mobilize the masses for economic, social, and security development, thereby strengthening the authority of local governance.

Operating with a 5-year term, the People's Council of communes, wards, and commune-level towns functions through meeting sessions and the working performance of the Standing Committee, divisions, and delegates. Meeting sessions are conducted with a collective working regime, with decisions made by majority vote, except for cases involving relieving or dismissing delegates, which require a two-thirds majority vote.

The Standing Committee of the People's Council operates daily with the principle of democratic centralism, overseeing council activities, submitting reports, and issuing special documents to fulfill its duties and powers. Members of the Standing Committee are collectively responsible for their actions, both to the People's Council and individually for their assigned tasks.

The Chairman of the People's Council leads the Standing Committee's activities, maintaining communication with the People's Committee, state agencies, and other relevant bodies. The Vice Chairman assists the Chairman and assumes their duties in their absence. Divisions of the People's Council operate similarly, with collective responsibility for their tasks and individual accountability for their divisional responsibilities.

Lastly, delegates of the People's Council represent local constituents, exercising state power, expressing their will and aspirations, and bearing responsibility to the people for their actions.

** The operation of the People's Committee at commune level*

At the commune level, the People's Committee undertakes various duties and powers, including developing and submitting local issues to the People's Council for decision-making, implementing the local budget, and executing tasks delegated by superior state agencies. The primary operational form of the People's Committee is through meeting sessions, convened and chaired by the Committee Chairman, covering topics such as working agendas, development plans, budgeting, and local reserve funds, all subject to approval by the People's Council.

The duties of the People's Committee at the commune level are also associated with the separate powers of the Chairman of the People's Committee, which are: (1) leading and managing the work of the People's Committee and its members; (2) directing and ensuring the implementation of the Constitution, laws, and documents of superior state agencies, the People's Council and the People's Committee; carrying out tasks related to national defense, security, ensuring the social order and safety, fighting and preventing crime and other violations of law, preventing and fighting against bureaucracy and corruption; taking measures to protect assets of agencies and organizations, protecting the people's life, freedom, honour, dignity, property, and other legitimate rights and interests; implementing population management measures in communes, wards and commune - level towns according to the provisions of law; (3) managing and effectively using working facilities at offices, assets and

the assigned state budget according to the provisions of law; (4) resolving the people's complaints, denunciations, violations of the law, and directly communicating with citizens for their inquiries according to the provisions of law; (5) authorizing the Vice Chairman of the People's Committee to perform tasks and powers within the Chairman's authority scope; (6) directing to take measures of protecting the environment, preventing and fighting fire and explosion; resolving unexpected and urgent tasks, related to preventing and fighting with natural disasters, epidemics, security, order and social safety in communes and commune-level towns according to the provisions of law; (7) perform duties and powers decentralized and authorized by superior state agencies.

The Vice Chairman of the People's Committee at the commune level is subject to assist the Chairman of the People's Committee; carry out management tasks associated with economic activities, culture, education, health, etc., and take individual responsibility in the working performance process. Members of the People's Committee are assigned by the Chairman to be in charge of certain specialized industries and fields such as military, police, etc., and are individually responsible for their duties carried out in communes, wards, and commune-level towns.

3. RESULTS

The essence of the state, as conceived, involves the active involvement of its citizens in the organization and functioning of governmental bodies, guided by the principle that the people are informed, engaged, responsible for implementation, and empowered to oversee. This ethos drives the operation of commune-level authorities, where increasing citizen participation is prioritized, fostering grassroots democracy (Doan, N.M., 2015; Mai, H., 2016). Beyond serving as representatives in the People's Council, commune-level authorities embrace direct democratic practices, further enhancing citizen engagement. Additionally, the operation of these authorities encompasses not only internal dynamics and interactions with other agencies but also extends to engagement with grassroots self-governing entities such as villages, hamlets, and residential clusters [Phuong, N.T., 2018; Phuong, N.M., 2021]. This unique feature highlights the coexistence of state agencies and grassroots self-governing structures, underscoring the need for effective collaboration to support the latter's operations, guided by local authorities.

While the theoretical functions and responsibilities of commune-level authorities vary based on the specific challenges and demographics they address, current legislation (VNA, 2015) suggests minimal discrepancies in their mandates. However, distinctions in authority exist among these agencies at the commune level. Primarily, the People's Council of a commune holds unique authority not extended to its counterparts in wards and commune-level towns. Specifically, the commune's People's Council is empowered to make decisions regarding measures to uphold social order and safety, combat crime and legal infractions, combat bureaucracy and corruption within their jurisdictional boundaries, and safeguard assets, rights, and interests of citizens within the commune.

Furthermore, the Chairman of the People's Committee in a ward or commune-level town possesses certain authority not held by the Chairman of the Commune People's Committee in a commune. Specifically, the former is tasked with coordinating with relevant agencies and organizations to execute urban infrastructure development plans, oversee construction projects, manage transportation systems, and implement measures for fire prevention, environmental conservation, spatial planning, architecture, and urban landscape preservation within the ward or commune-level town.

This discrepancy underscores a nuanced distinction between the governance of urban areas in wards and commune-level towns and the rural governance of communes, albeit not significant. This observation underscores the need for tailored approaches in developing the local authority model for communes, wards, and commune-level towns that align with the unique economic and social characteristics of each locality. In communes, alongside the established system of commune-level authorities and affiliated institutions such as hamlets and villages, managed by the state under legal frameworks, there exists a parallel system of traditional representatives—such as clan dignitaries, village elders, and religious figures—that regulate community behavior based on customs or conventions. Consequently, governance in communes should lean towards a self-governing paradigm that amplifies community aspirations and will. Conversely, in wards and commune-level towns, local authorities must prioritize urban management while also meeting the governance needs akin to those in rural communes.

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