

Promoting Civic Participation in Vietnam: the Case of the New Rural Program in a District of Ho Chi Minh City^{*}

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I. Introduction

Agriculture is a fundamental economic sector in the Vietnamese economy, contributing a significant proportion of the Vietnamese national gross domestic product (GDP). Vietnam's rural population was 79.7 percent of the total population in 1990, but it had declined to 71.2 percent in 2010.¹ The increase in the proportion of people living in urban areas in Vietnam is growing gradually over the years. Due to the increasing urbanization, the rural population is declining over the years, but the agriculture sector still plays a vital role in food security, job creation, and income for rural population. Agriculture has a decisive role in poverty reduction and national development. However, the employment rate in

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¹ For more detailed statistics, visit the website of the General Statistics Office of Vietnam at http://www.gso.gov.vn/default_en.aspx?tabid=467&idmid=3.

agriculture is considerably high at 70.3%.² This figure indicates the low rate of modernization and industrialization in Vietnamese agriculture. Additionally, although there is around 70% of the population living in rural areas,³ the living conditions and standards of this large part of population are significantly low, and underdeveloped in relation to the average development rate of the nation. The low development of the rural area has been a cause of concern for the whole political and administrative system of Vietnam. This is the reason for the emergence of the New Rural Development Program, which is a program that aims to push the development of the rural area and living standards of people in this area, thus contributing to the development of the whole country.

The New Rural Development Program launched in 2008 focuses on the development of the rural area in several dimensions (i.e. rural planning; infrastructure development, economic structure transition, economic development and income increase, poverty reduction and social welfare promotion, innovating and developing efficient socio-economic models, education and training in rural areas and health care, clean water, etc.). This is one of the nation-wide programs and receives the effort of the whole political and administrative system in Vietnam.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the capital available to meet the requirement of the Program is limited and hence it could affect the success of the Program. One of the main reasons is that there is a lack of resources as well as effective ways to mobilize the internal resources, especially community involvement for the Program, as well as civic participation. In other words, in the process of program

² Vietnam Bureau of Statistics. 2011. *Socioeconomic Status in 2011* (Tổng cục Thống kê 2011), Hanoi, Vietnam: Vietnam Bureau of Statistics.

³ Vietnam Bureau of Statistics. 2012. *Socioeconomic Status in 2012* (Tổng cục thống kê 2012), Hanoi, Vietnam: Vietnam Bureau of Statistics.

implementation, the participation of citizens in this program is fundamental to the successful implementation of the Program. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine several factors (areas and levels of civic participation, the mechanisms of civic participation, and barriers to civic participation) that could affect civic participation and hope to provide policy implications for the improvement of civic participation for a more successful New Rural Development Program.

II. Background of the New Rural Program in Vietnam

Since 2008, the government of Vietnam has implemented “the National Target Program on New Rural Development” (abbreviated as New Rural Program) for the period 2010–2020. This is a comprehensive program in socioeconomic development in 9050 communes in the rural area with 11 main contents and 19 criteria in order to create positive changes in the living standards of rural people. In comparison, the New Rural Program in Vietnam is similar with the *Saemaul Undong* (New Village Movement) in South Korea as well as the Rural Development Program in China to a certain extent.⁴

The Vietnamese Government has set specific targets for the next five years: 20% of all communes nationwide and 50% of all villages by 2020 will conform to the new rural standards. The Department of Rural

⁴ Cuong Trinh, 2012, *Experiences of Rural Development in Some Countries: Theory and Practice*, Hanoi, Vietnam: National Political Publishing House; Vernon Ruttan, 1984, “Integrated Rural Development Programs: a historical perspective,” *World Development* 12 (4): 393-401; I.R. Baek, Pan Suk Kim, and S. C. Lee, 2012, “Contributions and Limitations of Saemaul Undong in Korea for Regional Development and Welfare Improvement in Less Developed Countries,” *Public Administration and Development* 32 (4-5): 416-429.

Development and the Economic Cooperation Department of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development indicated that the National Target Program on New Rural Development aims to improve the economy and the living standards of Vietnam's rural areas.⁵ The Government has made a detailed action plan for implementing the Party's resolution under which the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is assigned to coordinate with relevant agencies to draw up a National Target Program on New Rural Development. At the Meeting VII in August of 2008, The Standing Committee of the Central Communist Party X issued a Resolution specializing in agriculture, farmers and rural areas. This Resolution emphasizes: agriculture, farmers, rural areas have a strategic role in industrialization and modernization, national construction and protection; are the important base and force for sustainable development, stable polity, national security assurance, maintaining and promoting national cultural identity and environmental protection.⁶

For implementation of the Resolution No. 26-NQ/TW of the Standing Committee of the Central Communist Party (2008), The Ministry of Polity granted the Secretary Board the right to direct the pilot of the New Rural Program in a period of modernization and industrialization. The Secretary Board established the Executive Central Board and approved the pilot of the New Rural Program, and the Executive Central Board was responsible for implementing the Pilot Program. Under the guidance of Communist Party, Vietnam's Government issued Resolution No. 24/2008/NQ-CP in

⁵ VOV World Service. 2012. *Vietnam's national target program on new rural development*. April 12, 2012. Access available at <http://vovworld.vn/>.

⁶ Standing Committee of the Central Communist Party. 2008. *Resolution No. 26-NQ/TW: Resolution on 05/8/2008 of Standing Committee of Central Communist Party X on agriculture, farmers, rural areas* (Nghị quyết số 26-NQ/TW ngày 05/8/2008 của Ban Chấp hành trung ương Đảng khóa X về nông nghiệp, nông dân, nông thôn), Hanoi, Vietnam: Standing Committee of the Central Communist Party.

October of 2008 relating to the New Rural Development Program and the Executive Program of Government on constructing agriculture, farmers and rural areas, unifying the perception and action relating to agriculture, farmers and rural areas, as well as the National Target Program on New Rural Development in Decision No. 800/QĐ-TTg in October 2010. Accordingly, the Vietnamese Government and relevant Ministries issued many legal documents to implement the New Rural Development, as shown in Table 1.

<Table 1> Legal Documents to Implement the New Rural Development

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| <p>① Decision No 491/ QĐ-TTg on April 16, 2009 by the Vietnamese Prime Minister about the criteria set for the new rural.</p> <p>② Decree No. 54/2009/TT-BNNPTNT on August 21, 2009 by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development about guiding the implementation of the National Criteria set out for the New Rural Development.</p> <p>③ Decree No. 26/2011/TTLT-BNNPTNT-BKHĐT-BTC on April 13, 2011 by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Ministry of Planning and Investment, the Ministry of Finance about guiding some contents of Decision No. 800/QĐ-TTg on 04/10/2010.</p> <p>④ Decision No. 342/QĐ-TTg on February 20, 2013 by the Vietnamese Government about amending some criteria in the National Criteria Set of New Rural.</p> <p>⑤ Decree No. 41/2013/TT-BNNPTNT on October 4, 2013 by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development about guiding the implementation of the Amended National Criteria set for New Rural Development.</p> |
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* Note: A decision is issued by the Prime Minister, while a decree is to specify and carry out a decision made by the Prime Minister in Vietnam.

The New Rural Program is a deep coverage program including aspects of the local economy, culture, society, polity and national security. The main content of the New Rural Program is to construct modern lives for rural communities; maintain cultural identity and an eco-friendly environment in accordance with urban development. The program also focuses on developing rural socioeconomic infrastructure in compliance with the zone planning and socio-economic planning of industries, localities; and the promotion of the internal force of rural communities. It increases the level of education of the rural labour force and organises rural manufacturing within the agriculture and traditional craft village.

For implementing the New Rural Program, there are many incentives. The New Rural Program was started with the citizen's awareness improvement campaign. This campaign involved citizens in the New Rural Program by having them clearly understand it. The New Rural Program makes use of many financial sources from other national target programs and local target programs; the mobilization of local resources and entrepreneurs in a locality; the voluntary contribution from local people; and non-return official development assistance (ODA) and credit capital. The central government provides full financial resources for planning, local roads to the center of communes, cultural house, local health center, and public servant training. Local government is financially responsible for the other items in the New Rural Program.

III. Literature Review on Civic Participation

Civic participation generally refers to the engagement of the general public to become involved in the political or administrative process and the issues that affect the community. In other words, civic participation is the

process that can meaningfully tie programs to people. As economic development in Vietnam has increased over the three decades of renewal (*Doi Moi*), people's expectations of public decision-making are also changing. Vietnam's Constitution and political structure offer opportunities for citizens to participate in governance through in-person engagement at the local level. Yet the implementation of legal rights to participation often lags behind the letter of the law. In the following section, three related issues are reviewed including the concept of civic participation, levels of civic participation, and barriers to civil participation.

3–1. Civic Participation

Civic participation has been the topic of a lot of literature since the 1960s. There are several approaches in conceptualizing civic participation. First, civic participation is driven by socio-political commitment. It is usually connected with human rights, service delivery and empowerment.⁷

Second, civic participation indicates a democratic improvement.⁸ The more inclusive participation in the decision making process, the greater the democracy involved.⁹ Civic engagement is the core of democracy and a

⁷ L. M. Morgan, 2001, 'Community participation in health: perpetual allure, persistent challenge,' *Health Policy Plan* 16 (3): 221–230; M. M. Amanda, M. S. Sherraden, and S. Pritzker, 2006, 'Civic Engagement among Low-Income and Low-Wealth Families: In Their Words,' *Family Relations* 55 (2): 152–164.

⁸ A. Halachmi and M. Holzer, 2010, 'Citizen participation and performance measurement: operationalizing democracy through better accountability', *Public Administration Quarterly* 34 (3): 378–399; A. E. Sarker and M. K. Hassan, 2011, 'Civic engagement and public accountability: An analysis with particular reference to developing countries', *Public Administration and Management* 15 (2): 381–417.

⁹ Sunhyuk Kim, 2010, 'Collaborative governance in South Korea: Citizen participation in policy making and welfare', *Asian Perspective* 34 (3): 165–190; M. S. Ahmad and N. B. A. Talib, 2011, 'Decentralization and Participatory Rural Development: A Literature Review', *Contemporary Economics* 5 (4): 58–67.

place where citizens exercise their rights, voice and conscience.¹⁰ Actually, civic involvement is not only about how to mobilize citizens in making decisions, but also a means of checks and balances on the government that could enable better governance.

Third, civic participation is also considered under the light of social psychology of participation.¹¹ Psychological aspects are driving factors of participation. The starting point of this approach is the lack of a sense of control over health and well-being by the poor and marginalized. This lack leads them to a tendency of waiting for the help of outsiders. They participate as they feel the need to take help from the other actors and agencies. This approach could be reasonable in some arenas such as health and poverty elimination. If there is no pressure on their situation, citizens have no “push” from inside to participate.

Fourth, civic participation is the input of decision-making. This type of participation is called the consultative model.¹² This approach has a close connection with the second approach of civic participation in this study, as the core purpose of this participation is the improvement of democracy. The policy cycle takes civic engagement as one of the important inputs for an effective policy. This type of participation is complex with both flows from government and citizens shaping governance and policy; two-way multidirectional interaction. The logic of this type of participation is that external political controls assumedly determined bureaucratic decisions,

¹⁰ A. M. McBride, M. S. Sherraden, and S. Pritzker, 2006, ‘Civic engagement among low-income and low-wealth families: In their works’, *Family Relations* 55 (2): 152-162.

¹¹ Leonard Baatiema, Morten Skovdal, Susan Rifkin and Catherine Campbell, 2013, ‘Assessing participation in a community-based health planning and services programme in Ghana’, *BMC Health Services Research* 13: 233.

¹² C. G. Reddick, 2010. ‘Citizen interaction and e-government Evidence for the managerial, consultative, and participatory models,’ *Transforming Government: People, Process and Policy* 5 (2): 167-184.

outputs and outcomes.¹³ However, in this approach, civic participation has both advantages and disadvantages.¹⁴

3–2. Level of Civic Participation

According to Amanda McBride and her associates (2006), civic participation is illustrated from two aspects: social participation and political participation. Social participation implies the behavior of the membership in a group, association and organization, while political participation includes behaviors relating to legislative, electoral, judicial processes and public decision-making.¹⁵ However, civic participation is not only about political participation, it is also about public service functions and management functions.¹⁶ People are involved in these two types of functions of the government. Practically, civic participation is not always genuine. Due to this, Sanoff¹⁷ asserts that there are two levels of participation. Participation is “pseudo” (false participation) when the purposes of participation are to inform citizens about decisions, placate their complaints, and manipulate their opinions. In contrast, in genuine participation, citizens are a dominant force in public management.

¹³ K. Yang and K. Callahan, 2007, 'Citizen Involvement Efforts and Bureaucratic Responsiveness: Participatory values, Stakeholders pressures, and Administrative practicality', *Public Administration Review* 67 (2): 249-64.

¹⁴ R. A. Irvin and J. Stansbury, 2004. 'Citizen Participation in Decision Making: Is It Worth the Effort?' *Public Administration Review* 64 (1): 55-66.

¹⁵ A. M. McBride, M. S. Sherraden and S. Pritzker, 2006, 'Civic engagement among low-income and Low-Wealth Families: In their works', *Family Relations* 55 (2): 152-162.

¹⁶ Wang, X. 2001, 'Assessing Public Participation in U.S. Cities', *Public Performance and Management Review* 24 (4): 322-336.

¹⁷ H. Sanoff, 2000. *Community participation methods in design and planning*. New York: Wiley.

Government just plays the role of setting goals, providing incentives, monitoring process and providing information.¹⁸

3-3. Barriers of Civic Participation

There are four theoretical perspectives of civic engagement: institutional, cultural, life course, and resource based theories with different focuses. First, institutional theories focus on opportunities for engagement with political rights and freedom for participation. Second, cultural theories examine the impact of socialization on civic engagement. Third, life course theories discover the correlation between different life stages and civic participation. Fourth, resource based theories analyze the effects of available resources such as money, time, assets and organizational membership on civic participation.¹⁹

IV. Research Method

A focal area of this study is Bình Chánh, which is located in the West-South West of Ho Chi Minh City (formerly known as Saigon). It is one of the five rural districts of Ho Chi Minh City, with 25,255.29 hectares, contributing 12% of the total area of Ho Chi Minh City. Its population is

¹⁸ J. E. Gray and L. W. Chapin, 1998. 'Targeted community initiative: Putting citizens first.' In C. S. King and C. Stivers (eds.), *Government is Us*, pp. 175-194. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; L. C. Plein, K. E. Green, and D. G. Williams, 1998. 'Organic planning: A new approach to public participation in local government.' *Social Science Journal* 35 (4): 509-523.

¹⁹ A. M. McBride, M. S. Sherraden and S. Pritzker, 2006, 'Civic engagement among low-income and Low-Wealth Families: In their works', *Family Relations* 55 (2): 152-162.

about 458,930 in 2011;²⁰ the highest number among other districts in Ho Chi Minh City.²¹ The Binh Chánh district economy is based on several sectors: industry, commerce and service, and agriculture. The industrial sector constituted the largest proportion of its economy with 74.46%, while the commerce and service sector, and agriculture were just 18.75% and 6.79% respectively in 2010.²² Although the Binh Chánh district has many achievements in economic development, it still has poor infrastructure as well as a low standard of living. Recognising the importance of the New Rural Program, the District Communist Party's Standing Committee established the District Executive Board of New Rural Program with 13 members. In 2010, the District Executive Board started to begin the implementation of the New Rural Program in 14 communes of Binh Chánh with the exclusion of the Binh Hưng commune and Tân Túc town. After five years of implementation, 12 communes in Binh Chánh met all 19 criteria of the New Rural Program with the proportion of 85.7% and 2 communes met 17 out of 19 criteria.²³ These achievements helped the Binh Chánh district receive the title of "The New Rural District."²⁴

In July of 2014, a survey questionnaire was sent to local citizens in the Binh Chánh District where the New Rural Development Program is being carried out. For the survey, the respondents were chosen randomly when

²⁰ Binh Chánh District. 2013. *Binh Chánh's Natural background posted date on January 14, 2013* (Điều kiện tự nhiên, đăng ngày 14/1/2013). Access available at <http://binhchanh.hochiminhcity.gov.vn/gioithieu/gioithieu/Lists/Posts/Post.aspx?CategoryId=16&ItemID=60&PublishedDate=2013-01-14T14:20:00Z>.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Dân Việt (an online newspaper in Vietnam). 2015. *Ho Chi Minh City: Binh Chanh district become richer thanks to the New Rural Program, posted date on August 27, 2015* (TP. HCM: Bình Chánh giàu lên nhờ nông thôn mới, đăng ngày 27/8/2015), access available at <http://www.vca.org.vn/hop-tac-xa/nong-thon-moi/12306-binh-chanh-ngay-mot-giau-len.html>.

²⁴ Ibid.

they were approached by the local authorities. The author of this study invited the help of public servants in the Commune People’s Committees to provide citizens with questionnaires when they come to Commune People’s Committees for public services. They completed the questionnaires and 127 questionnaires were returned. The population of the Binh Chanh District was 458,930 in 2011. There are no statistics on population age structure. Due to this, this study used the number of people of working age in rural areas as an alternative. The study chose those who live in rural areas as the New Rural Program is only implemented in rural. The number of people of working age in rural areas of the Binh Chanh district in 2011 was 319,297.²⁵

<Table 2> Summary of the Survey Respondents

Variable Name	Sub-category	Frequency (N=127)	Percent
Age	20-39	51	40.2
	40-49	36	28.3
	50-59	22	17.3
	60-75	18	14.2
Educational Level	Postgraduate	1	0.8
	Bachelor	29	22.8
	Associate college	15	11.8
	Vocation education	5	3.9
	High school diploma	43	33.9
	Middle school	16	12.6
	Elementary school and no formal education	18	14.2

²⁵ Binh Chánh District, op, cit.

Occupation	Retiree	11	8.7
	Farmer	15	11.8
	Small-seller	46	36.2
	Laborer	7	5.5
	Others	48	37.8
Income Level per month	High (more than US\$160)	19	14.9
	Middle (US\$100-160)	105	82.7
	Low (US\$99 or below)	3	2.4

The respondents are considered through four variables: age, educational level, occupation, and income level. First, the age of respondents ranged from 24 to 75 years old and a mean age was 44. There is a slightly small difference between the age groups of respondents. The majority of respondents were residents under 50 years old (68.5 %), old), while the proportion of residents over 50 years old was 31.5%.

Second, the education of respondents was divided into 7 levels ranging from postgraduate to elementary school level. The survey had one respondent with postgraduate degree (or Master degree). The high school educational level was the highest group with 33.9%. Surprisingly, the second highest group was those with BA degree with 22.8%. Since Bình Chánh is a suburban district of Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam, its residents were relatively well educated in comparison with other rural areas. Elementary school level (including no formal education) came to the third with 14.2%, followed by the middle school level (12.6%).

Third, the respondents' occupations were varied. The majority of respondents were small-scale sellers or merchants with 36.2%. Small-scale sellers are those who open and run small stores such as stationery stores, small bookshops, small food shops, and small living-goods stores. The

proportion of farmers who participated in this survey was 11.8%, while the proportion of laborers was just 5.5%. Retirees (8.7%) are those who used to work for private companies or state organizations. Other occupations accounted for 37.8%. Other occupations were not defined clearly in the survey. They could be public servants, housewives, jobless people or those who were studying.

Fourth, the average annual income of Binh Chanh in 2011 was US\$1,523 per person.²⁶ This indicated that the average monthly income of a person in Binh Chanh was about US\$127. Due to these numbers, the study divides the respondents' income in three groups considering Vietnamese local contexts: high-income group with above US\$160 per month; middle-level income group ranging from US\$100-160 per month, and the low-level income with under US\$99 per month. The majority of respondents had income of the middle level of the local context at 82.7%. The high and low level groups had the rate of 14.9% and 2.4%, respectively.

In order to measure the level of civic participation, we incorporate it with the questions about areas of participation with four-point Likert scale (3=strongly agree, 2=agree, 1=disagree, and 0=strongly disagree). This incorporation also allowed us to evaluate the degree of civic participation in terms of participation areas. The participation areas include (1) management functions such as budget management, human resource management and procurement; (2) decision-making including defining goals of program; (3) defining implementation strategies such as developing strategies for the implementation of programs, developing

²⁶ Binh Chanh's People's Committee. 2011. *General information about Binh Chanh District. UBND Huyện Bình Chánh 2011* (Thông tin khái quát về Huyện Bình Chánh), access available at <http://binhchanh.hochiminhcity.gov.vn/gioithieu/Pages/binh-chanh.aspx>.

alternatives for the implementation of strategies, budget negotiation, and deciding about budget operation in a locality; and (4) monitoring and supervision, such as monitoring, evaluating, and auditing the implementation of the New Rural Development.

In defining the goals of the program, there are four aspects: developing strategies to meet program goals; developing solutions; budget negotiation; and decisions on budget management. Monitoring and controlling involves evaluating and auditing the program. For controlling variables, this paper uses the model of Wang (2001) with consideration of the Vietnamese context. Four controlling variables are age, education, occupation and income.²⁷

In terms of civic participation, two dimensions are examined: the mechanisms of participation and barriers to participation. First, mechanisms of participation consist of a variety ways that could allow civic participation. Mechanisms of participation are meeting with civil servants, commune representatives, commune meetings, citizen's representatives, surveys, group discussions, hotline, and the Internet. Second, barriers to participation are also examined with a four-point-scale: strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. Eight barriers listed in the survey are (1) lack of time, (2) lack of trust, (3) communication between local authorities and citizens; (4) the degree of clarity of goal setting; (5) program understanding; (6) financial capacity; (7) restrictions from local authorities; and (8) civil servants don't have enough time.

²⁷ Wang, op. cit.

V. Findings

Based on the analysis of the survey data, areas and levels of civic participation, the mechanisms of civic participation, and barriers to civic participation are examined in the following section.

5-1. Areas and Levels of Civic Participation

There appears to be a low level of participation in every arena of participation. Among four areas (management functions, decision-making including defining the program's goals, defining implementation strategies, and monitoring and supervision), the dimension (in the area of defining implementation strategies), which receives the highest level of participation, is developing alternatives of policy implementation (47.50 from frequent to extremely frequent participation). Of the four areas of participation, defining implementation strategies has the highest rate of participation on average. The other three dimensions receive low participation even though these areas are very important for the genuine engagement.

First, management functions involve budget management, human resource management, and procurement. These functions receive a low rate of civic participation with only 3.75%, 2.5% and 0% respectively for extremely frequent participation and 10%, 12.50% and 11.25%, respectively for frequent participation. The rate of non-participation is 62.5% for budget management, 66.25% for human resource management and 70% for procurement. Second, on decision-making including the defining goals of the program, although citizens are involved in this area more effectively than that of the management function, the participation rate is also low with 37.5% (3.75% plus 33.75%). Third, for program implementation, the survey focuses on developing implementing strategies and alternatives to

obtain the goals of the program; discussing the program budget; and decision-making on budget management issues. In these four dimensions, the budget management discussion receives the least rate of participation with 72.50% non-participation. Citizens participated actively in developing alternatives for program implementation (47.25% from frequent to extremely frequent participation). Fourth, although the area of monitoring and supervision is of significance for genuine participation, citizens appear not to engage actively in it.

<Table 3> Areas and Levels of participation

Areas of participation	Extremely frequent (%)	Frequent (%)	Not frequent (%)	Not extremely frequent (%)
Management Functions				
Budget management	3.75	10.00	23.75	62.50
Human resource management	2.50	12.50	18.75	66.25
Procurement	0	11.25	18.75	70.00
Decision-making				
Defining goals of Program	3.75	33.75	21.25	41.25
Defining Implementation Strategies				
Developing strategies to obtain the goals of program	12.50	11.25	23.75	52.50
Developing alternatives of program implementation	5.00	42.50	18.75	33.75

Budget negotiation	1.25	7.50	18.75	72.50
Participation in making decisions on budget management of the local authorities.	13.75	8.75	18.75	58.75
Monitoring and Supervision				
Supervising the program implementation	1.25	40.00	15.00	43.75
Evaluating the program implementation	1.25	21.25	25.00	52.50
Auditing the program implementation	0	8.75	20.00	71.25

Civic participation is not significant in management functions (see Table 3). Only 15% respondents agreed or strongly agreed that citizens participated in human resource management. In addition, only 13.75% respondents were involved in budget management. Noticeably, 11.25% participated in procurement. However, in decision making, civic participation is more active (see Table 3). There are 37% of respondents who were involved in defining the goals of the program. In defining strategies and policies for implementation, citizens were actively engaged in developing alternatives of program implementation with 47.5% respondents who agreed and strongly agreed. Fewer citizens participated in defining strategies to obtain the goals of program (23.75%). The other two dimensions (budget negotiation and participation in decision making on budget management of the local authorities) received a low rate of participation (8.75% and 22.5%, respectively). In supervision and control, although the rate of participation in supervising the program implementation is relatively high with 41.25%, there is very low rate

(22.5%) of participation in evaluating and auditing the program implementation.

5–2. The Mechanism of Participation

There are a variety of mechanisms used for participation but not effectively (see Table 4). The traditional mechanisms such as public hearings, community board of representatives, community meetings are used more frequently with 30%, 37.5% and 36.25%, respectively. In contrast, the use of modern mechanisms (individual citizen representatives, the hotline, surveys, and group discussions), are not very common. Of these, the Internet is used the most with 16.25%.

<Table 4> The Use of Participation Mechanisms

Participation mechanism	Extremely frequent (%)	Frequent (%)	Not Frequent (%)	Not Extremely frequent (%)
Public hearings	3.75	26.25	23.75	46.25
Community board of representatives	5.00	32.50	26.25	36.25
Community meetings	5.00	31.25	15.00	48.75
Individual citizen representatives	3.75	6.25	21.25	68.75
Hotline	2.50	5.00	13.75	78.75
Survey	3.75	6.25	30.00	60.00
Group discussion	2.50	7.50	8.75	81.25
Internet	3.75	12.50	11.25	72.50

5-3. Barriers for Participation

This study found that many barriers limited civic participation. These barriers come from both the side of citizens as well as the side of government (political leaders and public servants). It is surprising that the lack of time of public servants challenges civic participation most and scores 55%. A lack of understanding about the program and the time of citizens with 43.75% and 41.25%, respectively are also challenging civic participation. The role of political leaders has least impact on participation (28.75%). The political leaders want to control and do not want to encourage civic participation. McCourt (2003) asserts that the very nature of political culture and bureaucratic bungling pose stupendous threats to effective participation of civic groups. The lack of political commitment in implementing reforms has remained a perennial problem in most developing countries.²⁸

<Table 5> Barriers for Civic Participation

Barriers	Strong impact (%)	Impact (%)	No Impact (%)	No strong impact (%)
Citizens' lack of time	6.25	35.00	15.00	43.75
Lack of trust in the local government	16.25	15.00	21.25	47.50
Communication between citizens and authorities is not good	10.00	22.50	17.50	50.00
Goals of participation are not	3.75	30.00	12.50	53.75

²⁸ W. McCourt, 2003, 'Political Commitment to Reform: Civic Service Reform in Swaziland.' *World Development* 31 (6): 1015-1031.

defined clearly				
Lack of understanding about the program	12.50	31.25	17.50	38.75
Lack of budget to organize the civic participation	12.50	23.75	12.50	51.25
The political leaders want to control and do not want to encourage the civic participation	13.75	15.00	17.50	53.75
Public servants' lack of time	7.50	47.50	7.50	37.50

VI. Policy Implications and Conclusions

The study examines civic participation in the New Rural Development Program in three aspects: areas and levels of civic participation; the mechanism of civic participation, and barriers for civic participation. This study found that the areas related to budget management, supervising and controlling receive a significantly low rate of participation. The reason could lie with the low openness of local authorities to participation. Although the civic participation in these areas is legally established, the implementation of it is not effective due to local public servants' low awareness of civic participation. More importantly, citizens may not clearly understand their role and ignore implementing their rights of participation.

This study also found that various participation mechanisms have been used. However, participation mechanisms are not effective in promoting civic participation. Modern participation mechanisms appear to fail in involving citizens' participation. The community board of representatives is the most effective way to encourage citizens to participate. This could be because each locality is organized and represented by a community board.

This board has the role to connect citizens and local authorities. This board is chosen by citizens in the locality and could be the voice of citizens. Due to this, citizens prefer to exercise their participation through this board. Then the matter here is the low active role of the community board in the locality. Members of the community board are drawn from retired members of the community. Many of them cannot meet the requirement of civic participation. This situation hinders the civic participation through community boards.

The study found that there are many barriers to participation. These barriers impact significantly on civic participation. Public servants and citizens' lack of time, and the lack of understanding of the program are three factors that challenge civic participation the most. In order to enhance civic participation, a more realistic framework should be developed for effective civic participation. Successful civic participation could be constituted by three main factors: citizens', public servants' and civic participation mechanisms. In order to promote more active and effective civic participation in New Rural Development, the following matters must be institutionalized.

First, citizens should be involved actively in the policy cycle from the very first stage of policy formulation, policy implementation, and policy evaluation. There is a need to get citizens involved in policies from the first stage of policy formulation. The policy cycle includes several phases: policy formulation, policy implication, and policy evaluation. In Vietnam, civic participation usually appears in the phase of policy implementation. This situation harms considerable civic participation and could easily generate false participation of citizens. Civic involvement from very early-on in the policy formulation stage helps citizens understand the policy and find their benefits in the policy in order to push their participation. Due to recognizing their benefits in the policy, they would have the willingness to

participate and cooperate with authorities in other stages of the policy such as policy implementation, and policy choice.

Second, government should make citizens fully aware of their rights. Many citizens in Vietnam as well as in Binh Chanh don't understand in-depth their rights in state management affairs. In their perception, state management belongs to the state itself. Their participation, if allowed, is perceived as a kind of grant from the authorities. They don't know that real participation is their right and they can require the authorities to involve them regarding their participation. Such "wrong perception" hinders their "participative enthusiasm" or "participation driver" and it makes many citizens stay away from the citizenry participation. An awareness of their rights in participation is a prerequisite for an effective participation of citizens. Local authorities and non-profit organizations, then, should first be concerned with improving the awareness of citizens about their rights of participation. The citizens should be provided with sufficient information about the areas in which they can be involved.

Third, citizens will want to engage as they find benefits for themselves in a program. This is a fundamental condition that encourages them to participate significantly. Before each program implementation, authorities should provide citizens with sufficient information about the rights and benefits that they could have from the program. Authorities could work closely with the sociopolitical associations to generate proper activities and incentives in information supply.

Fourth, citizens should know how to interact effectively with government. Low education could hinder the real participation of citizens as they could find difficulties in interacting with authorities. Authorities, then, should direct them how to interact. As mentioned, there are two types of participation mechanisms: traditional and modern mechanism. These two types of mechanisms were not employed effectively enough to engage

citizens. The traditional mechanisms such as public hearings, community board of representatives, community meetings were used more frequently, while the use of modern mechanisms is not very common. Authorities should improve the traditional mechanisms, as rural citizens prefer these. The modern mechanisms should be an additional option.

Moreover, public servants and political leaders should earn citizens' trust and sufficiently allocate their time and effort in promoting civic participation. Bureaucratic efforts mean bureaucratic responsiveness, as citizen involvement is a manifestation of bureaucratic responsiveness to citizens.²⁹ The responsiveness includes responsiveness to external stakeholders, participatory values and administrative practicality. Responsiveness to external stakeholders is to respond to competing demands from external stakeholders including citizens.³⁰ Participatory values indicate administrative values that could embed civic engagement and they include managerial attitudes towards citizen participation.³¹ Local citizens often distrust local government officials and local officials should be aware of the importance of civic participation: they are motivated not only by career concerns but also by the desire to solve community problems and achieve public interest.³² In other words, there is a need for developing the culture of this constructive alliance between civic actors and state officials.³³

²⁹ Yang and Callahan, op. cit.

³⁰ G. H. Salzstein, 1992. 'Bureaucratic Responsiveness: Conceptual issues and current research,' *Journal of Public administration Research and Theory* 2 (1): 63-88; F. E. Rouke, 1992. 'Responsiveness and neutral competence in American bureaucracy,' *Public Administration Review* 52 (6): 315-53; Yang and Callahan, op. cit.

³¹ J. Nalbandian, 1999. *Professionalism in local government: transformation in roles, responsibilities and values of city managers*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass: Yang and Callahan, op. cit.

³² Yang and Callahan, op. cit.

³³ Sarker and Hassan, op. cit.

Administrative practicalities of citizen's involvement should be considered realistically in terms of resources required, institutional capacity needed, and potential barriers.³⁴ As the importance of public servants in generating civic participation cannot be stressed enough, they should be also equipped with the skills that benefit civic participation. This is because it is suggested that effective decision making results from effective participation which corresponds with utilizing participation techniques that are appropriate for the specific context of the decision.³⁵ Promotion of civic participation involvement could be considered as one of the compulsory duties of public servants.

In sum, civic participation is of vital importance for the effectiveness of public administration. However, genuine civic participation could face many obstacles in the field. Civic participation in the New Rural Development of Vietnam, as shown in the study of the Binh Chanh district, faces difficulties from the citizens themselves, the participation mechanism, the openness of the authorities and public servants. Improving the awareness of citizens through supplying sufficient information could initiate the promotion of civic engagement. The legal regulations to standardize civic participation are vital in generating a legal framework for citizenry engagement. Civic involvement should be included as compulsory in public sectors to create the openness of this sector towards civic participation.

Finally, it must be noted that rural development strategies for remote and upland areas require differentiated approaches as the agricultural outlook, constraints and opportunities are fundamentally different from those in the

³⁴ Yang and Callahan, op. cit.

³⁵ M. M. Berner, J. M. Amos, and R. S. Morse, 2011, 'What constitutes effective citizen participation in local government? View from city stakeholders', *Public Administration Quarterly* 35 (1): 128-163.

Red River and Mekong Deltas. In Vietnam, this notion appears often to be misunderstood. For example, the current criteria for New Rural Areas do not adequately capture the current realities, needs and aspirations of local communities including ethnic minority communities in upland areas. The majority of the poor in Vietnam still live in rural areas, while over half of the poor belong to ethnic minorities. Many of the targets are too high for the current reality in remote areas. As a result, strategies may be inappropriate and, consequently, the program may bypass such communities.

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베트남의 시민참여 촉진에 대한 연구: 호지민시 외곽지역의 신농촌사업 사례 연구

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베트남정부는 신농촌개발을 위한 10년간(2010-2020)의 국가목표사업을 추진하여왔다. 신농촌사업은 지방개발을 여러 차원(지역계획, 인프라개발, 경제구조변화, 경제개발, 수입증진 등)에서 추진한다는데 초점을 두고 2008년에 시작되었다. 이 프로그램의 성공여부는 정치행정집단의 정치적 의지뿐만 아니라, 지방에서의 시민참여 등에 달려있다고 할 수 있다. 지역시민은 그들 지역의 개발에 많은 기대감을 가지고 있지만, 베트남국가의 사회정치적 문화와 맥락에서 볼 때 적극적이지 않다. 지역개발에 참여하는 지방주민들은 사업집행에 대하여 지방관료들과 의견을 나누기도 한다. 그러나 시민참여차원에서 보면 그들의 참여율은 저조한 편이다. 이러한 배경에는 여러 가지 이유가 있을 텐데, 이 논문은 지방에 있는 주민들이 보다 나은 정책집행을 위하여 지방정부와 효율적으로 소통할 수 있는 기회를 충분히 갖고 있지 않다는 점을 지적한다. 지역 인프라는 국가 및 지역개발계획과 더불어 산업화와 현대화의 요건에 부응할 수 있는 장기적이고 지속가능한 성장을 담보할 수 있는 차원에서 개선되어야 한다. 또한 정치인과 관료들에 대한 불신이 높기 때문에 정치행정역량과 일선 관료의 자질도 강화되어야 한다. 아울러 공적 소통과 담론을 위한 정부의

개방성이 성공적인 시민참여를 가능하게 하는 또 다른 중요
요인이라고 할 수 있다.

주제어: 시민참여, 베트남, 신농촌사업, 호지민시

Abstract

Promoting Civic Participation in Vietnam: the Case of the New Rural Program in a District of Ho Chi Minh City

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The government of Vietnam has implemented “the National Target Program on New Rural Development” for the period 2010–2020. The New Rural Development Program was launched in 2008 focusing on development of rural areas in several dimensions (i.e. rural planning; infrastructure development, economic structure transition, economic development, and income increase, etc.). The key to the success of this program falls on not only the political will, but also the civic participation, in the local area. Although local citizens in rural areas have growing expectations for the development of their area, they have not been historically active under the socio-political culture in Vietnam. Local residents participating in the local development programs engage in discussions with local authorities about program implementation. However, there appears to be a low level of participation in every arena of participation. Accordingly, this paper argues that people in rural areas do not have sufficient opportunity to interact efficiently with local government for a better policy implementation. A developed local infrastructure needs to be improved to ensure a long-term and sustainable growth to meet requirements of industrialization and modernization in line with the

national and regional development plans. Moreover, the politico-administrative competences and quality of officials at the grass roots level should also be strengthened. Furthermore, the openness of government to public discussion and involvement is another factor that allows successful civic participation.

Key words: civic participation, Vietnam, new rural program, Ho Chi Minh City.

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