

A Study on Vietnamese Local Governance

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ABSTRACT

Local governance differs from local state management in that it emphasizes the interaction between government agencies and the people. The government mobilizes the participation of the people and the people are involved in the process of social development governance in the locality where they reside in both direct and indirect forms. This study addresses the participation of the people in local governance activities in the context of the political, cultural and social characteristics of Vietnam. Based on the theoretical framework developed, the author conducted a survey of 240 people and 240 leaders of commune-level government agencies in 3 localities representing the three regions of Vietnam, including: Bac Giang province (North), Quang Nam province (Central), Binh Phuoc province (South). The survey results show that people participate in local governance mainly in indirect forms, limited in the aspect of direct participation. From the results of this study, the author discusses the issue of researching policy and legal innovation in the direction of expanding people's participation rights to improve the effectiveness of local governance in Vietnam.

Keywords: Local; Government; Local governance; Vietnam

1. INTRODUCTION

Vietnam's local government is organized on a large scale, including 63 provincial-level governments, 705 district-level governments and 10599 commune-level governments (GSO, 2024). Each level of local government is organized with a People's Council (an agency elected by local voters) and a People's Committee (an agency that exercises executive power, established by the People's Council of the same level) (VNA, 2015).

Local government agencies perform functions and tasks of local development management according to decentralization and delegation of power, demonstrating democracy and in accordance with the characteristics of Vietnam's political and social regime as prescribed by the Constitution (VNA, 2013). Local people are mobilized to participate in organizing the government apparatus and managing local economic, cultural and social development in direct and indirect forms: Participating in democratic elections; discussing and deciding on a number of self-management tasks of the community (VNA, 2015; VNA, 2022).

In the trend of modern democracy, local governance in the world and Vietnam has also changed towards increasing government accountability and expanding people's participation in local economic, cultural and social development management activities. People want to increase their direct participation in local governance activities, requiring innovation and institutional improvement and implementing appropriate measures to mobilize resources from the people. This is the issue that the author is interested in when choosing this research topic.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the world, the term "local governance" appeared in the 1960s, but in Vietnam and many other countries, the issue of local governance is still in its infancy and is in the process of promoting research and pilot implementation. In some recent studies, the issue of local governance is discussed with the meaning of expressing the tasks of local

self-management (Cuong, N.V., 2015) and the interaction of local authorities with people to jointly solve community and local affairs (Phuong, N.T., 2018; Hai, D.P., 2019).

In terms of theoretical and practical research, Ngoc, D.B. (2013) argued that local governance is a new method of state management to effectively use resources, with special emphasis on people's participation in government activities. Cuong, N.V. (2015) and Phuong, N.T. (2018) share the same view with Ngoc, D.B. (2013), emphasizing the self-governance of local governments and the participation of many subjects, including people and social organizations to carry out common tasks of the community. Further explaining this issue, Son, N.V. (2024) affirmed the right of people to self-decide common tasks of the community and the locality; they participate in local governance on the basis of law and according to the principle of the common interests of the state and the people.

The above studies on local governance all emphasize the issue of self-governance of the government and the participation of local people. With different approaches and explanations, researchers affirm that local governance, in addition to government governance, is also the broad participation of the people to jointly solve common tasks and jointly build and develop the locality. And the task set out in the governance and operation of local governments is to mobilize many local resources to develop the economy, culture, society and maintain security and order in the area; policies of government agencies related to community development need to be democratized in the process of building, promulgating and implementing with the broad participation of the people for the common interests of both the government and the people. In terms of theory, the author agrees with the above research viewpoints and research content; At the same time, from practical observations, the author emphasizes that local governance is associated with decentralization and delegation of power between the central and local governments, between local government levels, clearly demonstrating the self-governing nature of localities in economic, cultural, social development and solving common community problems.

With the above explanation, the "Local Governance" (LG) scale is built with the main content implied as the governance and operation of the government and the participation of the people in the process of building, promulgating and implementing local policies on economic, cultural and social development and solving common problems of the community. The content of the scale is explained generally, including: Government agencies perform the task of local development administration according to decentralization and delegation of power; mobilize the active participation of people in the process of building, promulgating and implementing local policies on economic, cultural and social development and solving common community problems (LG1); People have the right to participate and are mobilized/encouraged to participate in the process of building, promulgating and implementing local policies on economic, cultural and social development and solving common community problems (LG2); Local policies and tasks are issued and implemented in a democratic and transparent manner, demonstrated by the accountability of the government and the active interaction between the government and the people for the common interests of both sides - the state and the people (LG3).

Well-implemented local governance will create the ability to effectively use resources and support local economic, cultural and social development. At that time, local development is carried out by many subjects, aiming to eliminate legal barriers and transaction costs for local people, organizations and businesses. Whether local economic, cultural and social development plans are appropriate, feasible and effective depends largely on the interaction of local governance subjects, which are government agencies and people. People in the role of subjects participating in local governance are encouraged to interact with government agencies, they will be interested and voluntarily participate and together with the government successfully implement the goals of local economic, cultural and social development plans. With the nature of self-management and people's participation in the process of building, promulgating and implementing local policies on economic, cultural and social development and solving common community problems, the author emphasizes that: People's participation, active interaction between people and the government is an important criterion to evaluate the results and effectiveness of local governance. In both theoretical and practical aspects, people's participation is expressed in direct and indirect forms. According to Phuong, N.T. (2018) and Son, N.V. (2024), direct participation implies the people's right to discuss and decide on the community's self-management tasks; indirect participation implies the people's right to give opinions, recommendations and feedback to the government through the representative mechanism - elected representatives, usually at voter contact conferences.

Practice in Vietnam also clearly demonstrates the above two forms. According to current law (VNA, 2022), people are able to exercise their mastery through direct participation in discussions and decisions on the self-management tasks

of the community (direct participation), including the following contents: Direct discussion and decision on policies and levels of contributions to build infrastructure and public welfare works at the commune and village levels funded by people; direct discussion and decision on village conventions and regulations; election, dismissal, and removal of Village Chiefs; election and dismissal of members of the People's Inspection Committee and the Community Investment Supervision Committee. In addition, people are allowed to contribute opinions to the government through recommendations and reflections to People's Council delegates - elected representatives, which are often carried out at voter contact conferences; People's Council delegates listen to people's feedback and synthesize, research, and report to the People's Council; the implementation is then the responsibility of the government, mainly the state administrative agency - the People's Committee (indirect participation form). The author inherits the above viewpoint and research content to build the scale "People directly participate in local governance" (PDP) and the scale "People indirectly participate in local governance" (PIP), which are explained in detail below.

- People directly participate in local governance as shown in the main contents: People are empowered to directly discuss and decide on local policies and tasks related to economic, cultural, social development and solving common community problems (PDP1); People are empowered to proactively propose initiatives related to local economic, cultural, social development and solving common community problems (PDP2); People are mobilized/encouraged and supported to research and propose initiatives related to local economic, cultural, social development and solving common community problems and request the government to evaluate and implement (PDP3).

- People indirectly participate in local governance (PIP) as shown in the main contents: People have the right to proactively propose their wishes and contribute their opinions to the government through People's Council delegates on issues related to local economic, cultural and social development and to resolve common community issues (PIP1); People are allowed to participate in voter contact conferences in a democratic manner to reflect their opinions and propose their wishes to the government through People's Council delegates on issues related to local economic, cultural and social development and to resolve common community issues (PIP2); People are fully answered, fully and transparently explained about their reflections and wishes through People's Council delegates and through voter contact conferences (PIP3).

People's participation in direct and indirect forms reflects the democratic nature of local governance. In fact, the level of participation in these forms depends on the characteristics of the political regime of each country. And in general, the level of people's participation reflects the interaction between the government and the people, reflecting the effectiveness of local governance. Therefore, the author emphasizes the impact/influence of these two forms on local governance; the research hypothesis is: *People directly participating in local governance (H1), People indirectly participating in local governance (H2) are factors that have an impact/influence and reflect the effectiveness of local governance.*

From the above overview study, the author has built a theoretical framework with a 3-scale model: 02 scales - independent variables, including "People directly participate in local governance" (PDP) and "People indirectly participate in local governance" (PIP); 01 scale - dependent variable "Local governance" (LG). The model is designed to assess the impact of direct participation and indirect participation of people on the effectiveness of local governance. The above scales include 9 observed variables, designed by the author into 9 questions in the survey questionnaire and measured by a 5-level Likert scale: 1 - Strongly disagree; 2 - Disagree; 3 - No opinion; 4 - Agree; 5 - Strongly agree (Table 1, Figure 1).

Table 1. Theoretical framework

No	Scales	Encode	Rating levels				
			1	2	3	4	5
I	People directly participate in local governance	PDP					
1	People are empowered to directly discuss and decide on local policies and tasks related to economic, cultural, social development and solving common community problems.	PDP1					
2	People are empowered to proactively propose initiatives related to local economic, cultural, social development and solving common community problems.	PDP2					

No	Scales	Encode	Rating levels				
			1	2	3	4	5
3	People are mobilized/encouraged and supported to research and propose initiatives related to local economic, cultural, social development and solving common community problems and request the government to evaluate and implement.	PDP3					
II	People indirectly participate in local governance	PIP					
4	People have the right to proactively propose their wishes and contribute their opinions to the government through People's Council delegates on issues related to local economic, cultural and social development and to resolve common community issues.	PIP1					
5	People are allowed to participate in voter contact conferences in a democratic manner to reflect their opinions and propose their wishes to the government through People's Council delegates on issues related to local economic, cultural and social development and to resolve common community issues.	PIP2					
6	People are fully answered, fully and transparently explained about their reflections and wishes through People's Council delegates and through voter contact conferences.	PIP3					
III	Local Governance	LG					
7	Government agencies perform the task of local development administration according to decentralization and delegation of power; mobilize the active participation of people in the process of building, promulgating and implementing local policies on economic, cultural and social development and solving common community problems.	LG1					
8	People have the right to participate and are mobilized/encouraged to participate in the process of building, promulgating and implementing local policies on economic, cultural and social development and solving common community problems.	LG2					
9	Local policies and tasks are issued and implemented in a democratic and transparent manner, demonstrated by the accountability of the government and the active interaction between the government and the people for the common interests of both sides - the state and the people.	LG3					

Source: Compiled by the author through the review

Research model

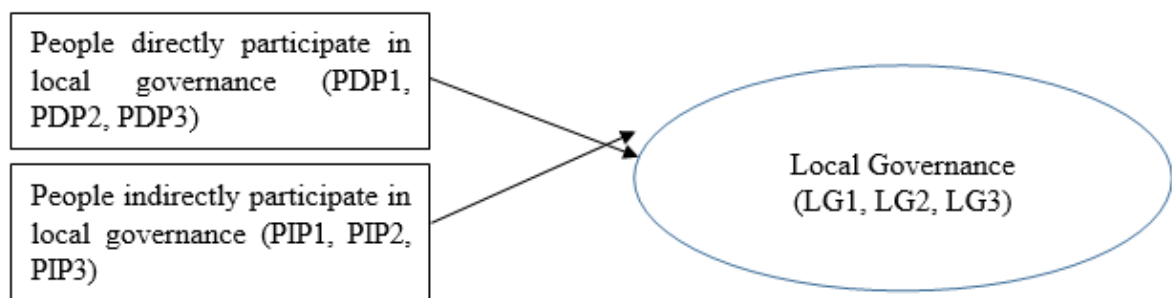


Figure 1. Research model

3. RESEARCH METHODS

The author uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods to analyze and evaluate local governance practices in Vietnam. Qualitative research is conducted through collecting and analyzing secondary documents to build a theoretical framework and research model. Quantitative research is conducted through practical surveys to verify the theoretical framework and research model. The survey to collect primary data is conducted in two steps: Preliminary survey and official survey.

a) Preliminary survey

The research model was built with 03 scales with a total of 9 observed variables. According to Hair, J.F. et al. (2009), the minimum sample size needed to perform regression analysis for the research model of 03 scales with 9 observed variables of this study is $N = 9 \times 5 = 45$. In fact, the author conducted with a sample size of $N = 240$ people ($N > 45$) and $N = 240$ commune-level government leaders ($N > 45$), showing high reliability when conducting survey research.

After designing and completing the survey form, the author conducted a preliminary survey in the research area - Bac Giang province with a sample size of $N = 80$ people and $N = 80$ commune-level government leaders. The preliminary survey results in Bac Giang province showed that the scales and observed variables were reliable enough to be used in an official survey on a larger scale.

b) Official survey

The author conducted an official survey in 3 localities representing the three regions of Vietnam, including: Bac Giang province (North), Quang Nam province (Central), Binh Phuoc province (South). The survey subjects were selected. For the people, they were those who in the last 3 years had at least 3 times performed administrative procedures - interacted with the commune-level government where they resided. For commune-level government leaders, it was the time holding the leadership position of at least 2 years.

The author conducted preliminary interviews to capture information about the standards of the respondents and distributed survey forms based on their consent to answer. The survey results collected 240/240 valid responses from the people and 240/240 valid responses from the leaders of the commune-level government, achieving a response rate of 100% for both groups of respondents. With the collected data, the author conducted scale testing, regression analysis to test the relationship between the scales and drew research conclusions.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

With the theoretical framework of the research built, the author conducted a survey sample size of $N = 240$ commune-level government leaders and $N = 240$ people in 3 localities representing 3 regions of Vietnam, including: Bac Giang province (North), Quang Nam province (Central), Binh Phuoc province (South). From the data of 480 collected survey forms, the author tested Cronbach' Alpha to identify the reliability of the scales and observed variables in the research model.

According to Hair, J.F. et al. (2009), the scales are reliable when meeting the standard condition of Cronbach'alpha > 0.6 ; the observed variables are reliable when meeting the standard condition of Corrected Item-Total Correlation > 0.3 . The test results show that all 3 scales and 9 observed variables in the initial research model are reliable enough to perform further analysis (Table 2).

Table 2. Statistical results and testing results of the scale

Scales	Observed variables	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach' Alpha	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
1. People directly participate in local governance (PDP)	PDP1	480	2	5	4.03	.627	.606	PDP1 = .464
	PDP2	480	1	5	3.49	.711		PDP2 = .372
	PDP3	480	2	5	3.52	.765		PDP3 = .348
2. People indirectly participate in local governance (PIP)	PIP1	480	2	5	4.15	.579	.648	PIP1 = .522
	PIP2	480	2	5	4.04	.582		PIP2 = .519
	PIP3	480	2	5	3.87	.601		PIP3 = .475

Scales	Observed variables	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach' Alpha	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
3. Local Governance (LG)	LG1	480	2	5	4.02	.623	.642	LG1 = .585
	LG2	480	2	5	3.92	.598		LG2 = .499
	LG3	480	2	5	3.88	.609		LG3 = .507
Valid N (listwise)		480						

Source: Author's survey results

Data in Table 2 shows that observations on the scale "People directly participate in local governance" (PDP), the scale "People indirectly participate in local governance" (PIP) and the scale "Local governance" (LG) are all rated at an average level of Mean > 3.49, statistically significant according to the Likert scale (1-5) determined.

However, the observed variables of the scale "People directly participate in local governance" (PDP) are assessed at a lower level than the scale "People indirectly participate in local governance" (PIP): Mean (PDP1) = 4.03, Mean (PDP2) = 3.49, Mean (PDP3) = 3.52, showing that people are less likely to directly participate in local governance activities. In which, the lowest is Mean (PDP2) = 3.49 and Mean (PDP3) = 3.52, affirming that people have limited rights to proactively propose initiatives related to local economic, cultural and social development and to solve common community problems on the basis of promoting resources from the people for the government to research and implement; The government rarely mobilizes/encourages and supports people to research and propose initiatives related to local economic, cultural and social development for the government to evaluate, approve and implement. This also contributes to demonstrating that people have limited rights to participate directly in local governance; which is mainly done indirectly, through People's Council delegates and often takes place at voter contact conferences. The survey results also reflect the current status of people's participation in local governance activities in Vietnam, quite similar to the content of participation stipulated by current Vietnamese law.

With the scale test value and the observed variables meeting the standards, the author conducted regression analysis to examine the relationship between the scales/independent variables "People directly participate in local governance" (PDP), "People indirectly participate in local governance" (PIP) with the scale/dependent variable "Local governance" (LG) (Table 3).

Table 3. Multivariate regression results

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1. Local leaders (Constant)	.816	.401		12.361	.000		
PDP	.290	.102	.401	4.813	.000	.522	1.811
PIP	.436	.179	.475	3.967	.000	.608	1.811
R ² = .648 Durbin-Watson = 2.003							
2. People (Constant)	.854	.362		11.672	.000		
PDP	.309	.146	.341	4.755	.000	.620	1.784
PIP	.386	.183	.366	3.839	.000	.665	1.784
R ² = .657 Durbin-Watson = 2.017							
a. Dependent Variable: Local Governance (LG)							

Source: Author's survey results

Data in Table 3 shows that in both the local leadership survey model (model 1) and the people survey (model 2), there is a correlation between the scales "People directly participate in local governance" (PDP) and the scale "People indirectly participate in local governance" (PIP) to the scale "Local governance" (LG), specifically:

- Firstly, R Square > 0 [$R^2 = .648$ (model 1) and $R^2 = .657$ (model 2)], confirming that the scale "People directly participate in local governance" (PDP) and the scale "People indirectly participate in local governance" (PIP) explain 64.8% (for model 1) and 65.7% (for model 2) of the variation in the scale "Local governance" (LG).
- Second, $1 < VIF < 2$ [$VIF = 1.811$ (model 1) and $VIF = 1.784$ (model 2)], showing that both regression models do not have multicollinearity; Durbin-Watson = 2.003 (model 1) and Durbin-Watson = 2.017 (model 2) reach the standard level ($1 < d < 3$), confirming that the scale "People directly participate in local governance" (PDP) and the scale "People indirectly participate in local governance" (PIP) are independent and both have an impact on the scale "Local governance" (LG).
- Third, the regression coefficient (B) of the scale "People directly participate in local governance" (PDP) and the scale "People indirectly participate in local governance" (PIP) in both regression models have positive values ($B > 0$) [$B(PDP) = .290$; $B(PIP) = .436$ (model 1) and $B(PDP) = .309$; $B(PIP) = .386$ (model 2)] and are statistically significant with Sig. < 0.05, confirming the positive relationship between the scales "People directly participate in local governance" (PDP), "People indirectly participate in local governance" (PIP) and the scale "Local governance" (LG); hypotheses H1 and H2 are accepted.

Based on the generalized regression model $Y = B_0 + B_1X_1 + B_2X_2 + \dots + B_iX_i$ (Hair, J.F. et al., 2009), the multivariate regression model of this study can be determined:

Model 1: Regression results of survey opinions of commune-level government leaders

$$LG = 0.816 + 0.290 \cdot PDP + 0.436 \cdot PIP.$$

Model 2: Regression results of people's survey opinions

$$LG = 0.854 + 0.309 \cdot PDP + 0.386 \cdot PIP.$$

The regression coefficients in the two regression models above show the correlation level of the independent scales/variables with the dependent scales/variables in ascending order: "People directly participate in local governance" (PDP), "People indirectly participate in local governance" (PIP). From here, the research conclusion is affirmed that people directly and indirectly participate in local governance activities, but limited to the level of direct participation. People are free to decide on local development governance tasks within the scope of self-determination on infrastructure construction, public welfare works contributed by themselves according to the provisions of law (VNA, 2022). However, in reality, there are many other social issues in the community that require the promotion of people's autonomy, such as production and business activities associated with community connections and indigenous culture of local residents, and they need to be empowered to discuss and decide directly on these issues.

The research results also show that people have limited rights to proactively propose initiatives related to local economic, cultural and social development and to solve common community problems based on leveraging resources from the people for the government to research and implement; the government rarely mobilizes/encourages and supports people to research and propose initiatives related to local economic, cultural and social development for the government to evaluate, approve and implement. This also contributes to demonstrating that people have limited rights to directly participate in local governance; which is mainly done indirectly, through People's Council delegates and often takes place at voter contact conferences. The survey results also reflect the current status of people's participation in local governance activities in Vietnam, quite similar to the content of participation stipulated by current Vietnamese law.

From the above research results, the author discusses the content that needs to be researched and innovated, which is the issue of perfecting institutions in the direction of expanding the rights of people to participate in local governance activities. The State needs to research and adjust policies to establish mechanisms to encourage and support people to research and propose initiatives related to local economic, cultural and social development for the government to evaluate, approve and implement in order to serve the common interests of the State and the people. Explaining this content, the author emphasizes that people in the role of subjects participating in local

governance are encouraged to interact with government agencies, they will be interested and voluntarily participate and together with the government successfully implement the goals of the local economic, cultural and social development plan. And so, with the nature of self-management and people's participation in the process of building, promulgating and implementing local policies on economic, cultural and social development and solving common community problems, people's participation and active interaction between people and the government are important criteria to evaluate the results and effectiveness of local governance; Democracy at the grassroots level is also promoted and the government has the conditions to mobilize many resources for development; people are satisfied when their rights and interests are guaranteed.

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