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1. An overview of egovernment

Government plays a central role in a country's development. However, the question of how to make government work efficiently at a low cost to taxpayers is a central concern for administrators. Given this contemporary context, the widely accepted answer is to build and develop an efficient egovernment.

So, what is egovernment? According to the World Bank, egovernment is the systematic use of information and communication technology by government agencies to handle relationships with citizens, businesses, and social organizations. The result is an improvement in the quality of transactions between government agencies, citizens, and organizations. Benefits aim to include reduced corruption, increased publicity, and convenience, all contributing to a nation's growth with reduced administrative costs.

Another interpretation is that egovernment is the application of information and communication technology in the activities of state administrative agencies from central to local levels. However, egovernment is not just a computer and the internet, but a comprehensive renewal of relationships, especially the relationship between a government and its citizens. It includes resources, processes, modes of operation, and the contents of central and local government activities which aim to provide better information and services for people to exercise their democratic rights and to be involved in state management.⁽¹⁾

In Vietnam, although the term egovernment is often cited in conferences, seminars, and scientific research reports, at the moment, there is no specific and clear definition.

At the same time this term has not been codified in legal documents. However, in research and practical activities, the term e-government is now being adopted to a certain extent. Thus, there is frequently a difference in the connotations of the term e-government.

However, e-government can be understood in a simple way.

- E-government is the application of information and communication technology by government agencies to innovate, work more effectively, efficiently, and transparently, to provide better information and services to people, businesses, and organizations. At the same time, it has the ability to create more favorable conditions for people to exercise their democratic rights which also include state management.
- E-government includes the use of information technology, and especially the internet, to improve the delivery of government services to citizens, businesses, and between government agencies.
- E-government allows citizens to interact and receive services from a central or local government 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. In short, e-government is a government that operates more effectively and efficiently, providing timely service on the basis of the application of information and communication technology.

The collective goal of e-government is to improve working processes in government agencies through e-administration, improving relations with people through e-citizen portals, and building a knowledge-based society built on information technology. From this common goal, the specific objectives of e-government are: (1) to improve the administrative competency of government agencies at all levels by facilitating exchange of electronic documents, collection of accurate information, resulting in timely decisions, and organized electronic briefings; (2) to provide people and businesses with public services that are easily accessed from anywhere; (3) to encourage people to become actively involved in policy making and contribute to the lawmaking process and the operation of government (4) to reduce costs of the government operation; (5) to establish a modern, efficient, and transparent government.

Egovernment creates a new leadership style, a new way of providing services to citizens, and improvements in the competence of whole country management. Therefore, in recent years, countries around the world have begun investing in building egovernment. For Vietnam, building egovernment is an urgent requirement, an important part in the process of modifying the public administration system, and working towards a digital government.

The development of egovernment goes through a number of stages. In the process its complexity increases dependency on its timely implementation and maintenance. The values brought to people and businesses also increases, including the benefits for the government via the possibility of increased revenue.

The benefits of egovernment includes meeting all the needs of citizens by improving the performance of central and local government. Egovernment brings convenience and effective and timely provision of public services to people and businesses. For citizens, egovernment means the simplification of procedures and increased efficiency of the work process. Egovernment helps strengthen the relationship between agencies within the state to ensure accurate and timely decisions.

2. Citizen involvement in government in Vietnam

The involvement of the Vietnamese people in the basic activities of the state defines the existence of the state itself. The absence or missing voice of the people causes the state to lose its legitimacy and *raison d'être*.⁽²⁾ The involvement of the people is involvement in the process of the social governance chain in which the state is the subject that initiates and directly operates.

With egovernment, in order for people to be involved in the state process and activity, the country must meet minimum conditions based on important processes such as budget accountability, access to public information, property records, and finally citizen involvement. The requirements for the involvement of the people are set to a high standard. Accordingly, the government's assurance that these criteria are met is a challenge for countries in general and Vietnam in particular.

There are many ways the public of the countries of the world form agreements with their governments. They often include forming a coalition with non-governmental organizations to achieve common goals. The government in return creates digital tools to interact with the public. People are able to engage in a discussion of pressing issues. Many governments in turn establish a center with experts and dedicated resources to support the common goal of citizen involvement. This results in citizen involvement to monitor the core competency of government officials. These processes generate guidelines for public participation in the development of legislation while creating public policy. One of the most important benefits is that citizens can assess government institutions and identify priorities for reform laws to create a stable environment for the people and social organizations.

In fact, the construction of egovernment in Vietnam has only just passed Phase 1 – using information technology and expanded communication and oneway interaction from the government to the people. Tasks of Phase 2 and Phase 3 are currently being implemented – increasing people's involvement in the activities of state agencies and perfecting the comprehensive interaction between the government, people, and business. Recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has created complications. In order to implement social distancing, limit mass contact, and reduce the risk of disease transmission, people have initially improvised their work and service methods. Most of the urgent notices, recommendations, and instructions of the government, including the ministries, sectors, down to the local level are being delivered to people via the Internet and OTT messages. Instead of face-to-face contact, many agencies and organizations are running their units using online meetings. They are also handling professional activities online. The entire education system has implemented online teaching and learning. People are using online public services to actively seek health information, stay informed through websites, and use applications of agencies and organizations.

According to a survey during the period 2015-2019 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Viet Nam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI)(3) saw significant annual changes. Initially, this confirms that people feel the government has moved in a positive direction. This

improvement is reflected in most of the content that makes up the PAPI index over the past 5 years. Of these indicators "participation at local levels," "transparency," "vertical accountability," "control of corruption," and "public service delivery" have all improved remarkably. Through an in-depth analysis of governance and public administration performance over nearly a decade, the 2019 report shows a positive trend in the whole country in the past 5 years with 5 out of 6 initial governance areas measured by the PAPI indices showing improvement. The average provincial score of 6 governance areas increased from 34 points in 2015 to 37.4 points in 2019, highlighting the improvement in provincial efficiency of government during the current government term (2016-2021).(4) With these statistics in mind, we will analyze some indicators found in PAPI regarding people's participation in e-government today.

First, the index of "control of corruption" was assessed by experts as making progress, increasing from a rating of 5.8 in 2016 to 6.15 in 2017.(5) The 2019 PAPI report shows a clear impact by the anticorruption campaign on people's perception of corruption. This sector improved the most in 2019 at the national and commune levels, with the percentage of people that perceived a reduction in corruption at these two levels showing an increase of 5% compared to those reporting in 2018.(6)

Experts attributed this improvement to the marked progress in the level of local corruption control, leading to a decrease in bribery at the local level. In addition, it is due to spillover effects witnessed in the nationwide anti-corruption campaign in recent years, when a number of corruption cases were publicly brought to trial, resulting in severe sentences.

Second, the index of "vertical accountability" measures the level of interaction between the government and the people and the actual performance of institutions working democratically at local levels, including the People's Inspection Committee and the Community Investment Supervision Board. This index begins with the historical content of the component of "interaction with local authorities" measured prior to 2013 – an index measuring the effectiveness of citizen voter contact at all levels of government according to the provisions of the Reception of Citizen Law of 2013. From 2018 onward, the content of "vertical accountability" has added two more adjusted and supplemental components of "local government's response to

citizens' appeals" and "access to justice services." Indicators on the initiative of citizens and local authorities to complaints and disagreements and settlement of these issues helped authorities at all levels assess the effectiveness of the implementation of the Law on Complaints in 2011 and the Law on Denunciations in 2011. Since 2018, this content index has been supplemented with the component "access to justice services" to assess the level of trust in the performance of local judicial authorities and the people's access to local courts, or a local mediator, when people needed to settle civil disputes.

In general, the effectiveness of local authorities implementing accountability to people at all levels is not high. This measurement quantifies the effectiveness of officials in their accountability, contact, and interaction with people. It includes civil servants at all levels of local government according to the provisions of the Law on Citizenship 2014 and relevant current regulations. In 2019 the index "vertical accountability," reached 4.63 points, in which "effective interaction with all levels of government," reached 1.96 points; "responding to people's complaints, disagreements, and questions," reached 0.68 points; and "access to judicial services" reached 1.99 points.

Third, the field of "public administrative procedures" did not see much change. The index even decreased slightly in 2018. This is surprising because the policy of simplifying administrative procedures in the Master Program on State Administrative Reform for the period 2011-2020 is one of the highlights of Vietnam's reform efforts from 1995 to the present. The government has tried very hard to expand the egovernment platform to allow people to access and complete online documents, but there has been no significant progress in convincing the public to transfer to these procedures. In this case, the percentage of people with home internet increased from 30% in 2016 to 60% in 2019, while the percentage of people attempting administrative procedures on the electronic platform was very low. In 2016 only 6% of people sought certificates online, while by 2019, the figure did not move much higher although people's home internet access increased significantly.

Meanwhile, the rate of going online to do private transactions was high. On a national scale there were districts that provided online public services to communes and

wards, but the number of online registration dossiers only reached 5-6% of the total. Some communes in remote areas have deployed dozens of online public service procedures at Level 3, but few people have registered yet. Many people, including those living and working in big cities, are still confused when asked about online public services. The reality is that citizens consider e-government to be the work of the government, and its ministries and sectors. There is no significant difference in the level of satisfaction of people who did administrative procedures online compared to the level of satisfaction of those doing administrative procedures in person.

The above situation is a result of many behaviors. These include people's fear of trying new methods, losing records, or revealing personal information; unsynchronized technology infrastructure; people's limited knowledge of information technology, especially people living in remote areas; incomplete data required for successful online public access, making it difficult to look up and use the data they find; and downplaying the implementation of electronic applications by officials.

Thus, although there has been progress in the institutional framework and citizen participation in e-government in Vietnam, currently obstacles still exist. Along with the process of "doi moi," integration of Vietnam into the world economy, and reform of the state digital infrastructure, people's participation is still being sought. It took a long time for central and local government to satisfy people, but there has not been as great an improvement as expected. All localities have plans which will increase the PAPI index but moving from directives and plans to result is a very long journey. Many localities have the political will but improvement at the lower level is not strong.(7) The legal system, as well as the political, economic and social institutions,(8) have established an environment which contributes to promoting citizen participation in online activities of the state and their government.

The people have been exercising state power through direct representative democracy via the National Assembly and the People's Council,(9) their democratic rights have been constitutionalized.(10) At the same time, the participation of the people in the affairs of the state through indirect democracy is also specified by the authorization increasing the participation of people's representatives.(11) However, there are still some issues in persuading people to participate in the use of e-

government in general, and the government systems in particular, which have not yet met the new requirements. This sets a new mandate for active and effective participation of the people in the operation of local governments. Local authorities need to move into this new era to meet the objectives set by the national government, which include the institutional system, the protection of people's rights, and the mode of moving the operation of e-government towards a comprehensive digital government for the future.

Tài liệu tham khảo

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- (2) La Khanh Tung (2019), "Open government and citizen involvement in Vietnam," Open Government, Egovernment and Modern Governance, Hong Duc Publishing House, p.120.
- (3) The PAPI index measures 6 subindices: participation at local levels; transparency; vertical accountability; control of corruption, public administrative procedures; public service delivery.
- (4), (6) Report on provincial governance and public administration performance index in Vietnam (PAPI) (2019), published on April 28, 2020.
- (5) [http://noichinh.vn/tin-tuc-su-kien/201804/chi-so-kiem-soat-tham-nhung-trong khu-vuc-cong-tang-diem-manh-nam-2017-303785/](http://noichinh.vn/tin-tuc-su-kien/201804/chi-so-kiem-soat-tham-nhung-trong-khu-vuc-cong-tang-diem-manh-nam-2017-303785/) of the Central Committee for Internal Affairs, accessed on August 7, 2020.
- (7) Comments of members of the PAPI research team at the online announcement ceremony of "Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index in Vietnam 2019" (PAPI 2019) on April 28, 2020.
- (8) These can be mentioned: the 2013 Constitution, the Law on Election of Deputies to the National Assembly and People's Councils (2015), the Law on Government Organization, the Law on Organization of Local Government.
- (9) Article 6, Constitution 2013.
- (10) Chapter 2, Constitution 2013.
- (11) The 2015 Law on election of deputies to the National Assembly and People's Councils contains a number of new regulations related to the allocation of the number of national assembly deputies and people's council deputies; constituency, polling area; national election council and local election organization; standing for election, consulting and introducing candidates; election communication and campaigning; voting, determining election results.