

The Viet Nam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index

Dimension 2: Transparency

PAPI measures citizens' "rights to know" about state policies that affect their everyday life and livelihoods. In particular, the transparency dimension looks at transparency in three key areas: poverty lists, commune budgets and local land-use planning and pricing. Information relating to these three sub-dimensions is required by the Grassroots Democracy Ordinance and recent legislation to be made publicly available in a transparent manner so that citizens across the country can "know, discuss, do and verify".

Overall Provincial Performance. The transparency dimension has declined sharply, falling by 7%, and with almost every indicator falling in most provinces. Between 2011 and 2015, 17 provinces saw a significant decrease in their performance score over time, while 11 provinces improved their performance by more than 5%. The largest hike is seen in Phu Tho (which improved its performance by 16%), while the steepest drops are seen in Ba Ria-Vung Tau and Son La (which both experienced a decline of about 20%).

In general, more northern and central provinces are found in the group of better performers than southern ones. There is also consistent performance across a number of provinces. For instance, Nam Dinh and Quang Tri have been in the best performing group for five consecutive years. Tuyen Quang has been in this group for three years in a row. Lai Chau, Bac Lieu and Kien Giang have been in the poorest performing group since 2011 and Khanh Hoa since 2012.

Transparency in Lists of Poor Households. This sub-dimension measures the share of citizens aware of the publication of lists of poor households in their commune and reflects how citizens experience the quality of these lists. Findings from the 2015 survey show that the percentage of citizens who are aware of the lists declined to 53% in 2015, after a slight increase for three years. Ha Tinh was seen as a place where poverty lists are usually made publically available (92% agreed). This is in contrast to Hai Phong, where few respondents found this to be the case (24%). Almost half (46%) of respondents nationwide believe that truly poor households are not included on the list, more than in previous years (36% in 2014). At the same time, a larger percentage of respondents than before (nearly 41% in 2015 compared to 34% in 2014) believe that households that are not poor are also included in the local poverty lists.

Transparency in Commune Budgets. Knowing how commune budgets are used is an important part of keeping local public officials under check and preventing diversion of public funds for private use. This sub-dimension reveals the level of transparency in commune budgets and expenditure, an important Grassroots Democracy Ordinance requirement that communes must comply with. All three sub-dimension indicators (that the commune budget and expenditure lists are made publicly available, that citizens read the budget and expenditure lists and that citizens believe in the accuracy of these) witnessed declines in 2015 compared to the previous four years. Of the 26.5% of respondents nationwide who read the commune budget, about 64% trust the accuracy of the information (compared to 32.5% and 74% respectively in 2014). In Ho Chi Minh City nearly 60% of respondents have access to the commune budget and expenditure lists, while in Long An nearly 97% of those who read the budget and lists believe in the accuracy of the information.

Transparency of Local Land-Use Planning and Price Frames. Measuring transparency in land-use planning and pricing helps to encourage local governments to publicize land plans and land compensation schemes. Findings from the 2015 survey show that there has been a regression in the publicity of local land-use plans since 2011, with the share of respondents nationwide aware of local land-use plans currently at about 12%. This might be because of the 2013 Land Law, effective since July 2014, which stipulates that land plans are now made at district and higher levels. However, commune People's Committees are still mandated to publicize information about local land plans and any changes to these plans. In Ha Tinh, the best performer in this indicator, only about 37% of respondents were aware of local land plans.

Of those informed of local land plans nationwide, only a tiny share (about 3%) had the opportunity to comment on them. There has also been a fall in the number of respondents who feel their comments are acknowledged. Overall, respondents feel that the impact of local land plans has been detrimental to their families and in local villages over the past five years. Dien Bien citizens were happier with recent local land plans than citizens in other provinces.

Recommendations. To improve transparency in a sustainable way, it is important for local governments to find various means of disclosing trustworthy information to citizens with different demographic backgrounds. This could, for example, be done through government portals at provincial and district levels. For rural and remote areas, notice boards at the commune level or loudspeakers at the village level would help disseminate information.

The Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI) is a policy monitoring tool that assesses citizen experiences and satisfaction with government performance at the national and sub-national levels in governance, public administration and public service delivery.

PAPI measures six dimensions: participation at local levels, transparency, vertical accountability, control of corruption, public administrative procedures and public service delivery. The survey has been implemented nationwide each year since 2011. For the 2015 PAPI Report, 13,955 randomly selected citizens were surveyed.

PAPI is a collaboration between the Centre for Community Support and Development Studies (CECODES), the Centre for Research and Training of the Viet Nam Fatherland Front (VFF-CRT) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The full 2015 PAPI Report and more in-depth analysis can be found at: www.papi.vn.