

CITIZEN SERVICE CENTERS

Pathways Toward Improved Public Service Delivery

One-Stop Shops in Vietnam

Changing the Face of Public Administration for Citizens and Businesses through a Single Door to Multiple Services

Abstract

This case study analyzes the development of one-stop shops in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, from inception of the first one in Ho Chi Minh City in 1995 through the full roll out of this model of integrated service delivery across the country, beginning in 2003. Embedded in the spirit of the “Doi Moi” reforms that began in the 1980s, one-stop shops have been an integral part of the government’s public administration reform program, initiated in 2001. Political support, decentralization, clear guidelines regarding organizational structure, and significant capital investment allowed the one-stop shop model to successfully transform the attitudes of civil servants toward the public, reduce bureaucracy, inefficiencies, and rent seeking, and improve the quality of services delivered.

1. A History of One-Stop Shops in Vietnam

Background and Context

The geographical coverage and number of administrative procedures offered by Vietnam’s almost 13,000 one-stop shops are remarkable, especially given the country’s large population size and its many ethnic minority groups. The one-stop shops operate at all levels of government, from

provinces and districts to commune, ward, and township level, ensuring that all citizens are in a few kilometers range of an access point to public administrative services. The geographical coverage of the one-stop shops represents approximately 98 percent of the country. Thanks to this model, citizens and businesses can access no less than several hundred administrative services from various functional departments and agencies through only one visit to a single office.

The implementation of one-stop shops nationwide has been part of a broader and comprehensive public administration reform program, which has profoundly affected the style, ethics, and values around public service. From a country recovering from a devastating war and among the poorest in the world, within a few decades, Vietnam has emerged as a middle-income country. This would not have been possible without the modernization of the government system, particularly the improvement of public service delivery for citizens and businesses, which has, in turn, contributed to the development of a market-oriented economy.

The broad policy framework that eventually led to the development of the one-stop shop concept was the “Doi Moi” (which means “renewal”), a string of reforms that officially began in 1986. It was a program of political, social, and economic change designed to bring Vietnam from its postwar state to ‘world-developed status’. It marked the beginning of

Vietnam's gradual transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy with socialist orientations. Key aspects of the reform process have included the devolution of authority within the state, the burgeoning of the private sector and civil society, and a focus on an equitable distribution of the benefits reaped through economic development. In this context, citizens began to increasingly call for more efficient and transparent service delivery for all—not only those who could afford the services. International trade integration, notably through the landmark Bilateral Trade Agreement with the United States and the World Trade Organization, also created a strong incentive for strengthening the rule of law and transparency.

In 2001, the public administration reform (PAR) program was formally inaugurated, although its antecedents were part of Doi Moi from the very start:

“PAR was regarded as the core of the process to continue building and developing the State with the objective to develop a State administration which is clean and competent, properly uses its powers and is gradually modernized in order to efficiently and effectively exercise the State management function, promote healthy and well oriented social development, successfully serving the people and developing law-abiding lifestyles and working styles” (Government of Vietnam 2004).

In its early stages, the PAR program consisted of four subprograms: (1) institutional and administrative procedure reform, (2) organizational reform, (3) human resource reform, and (4) public finance reform.

One-stop shops were a local innovation that took place under the overall ambit of the change that began with Doi Moi. In April 1994, the government passed a resolution,¹ highlighting the excessive complexity of public administrative procedures, the low level of responsibility agencies felt toward citizens, and how corruption was limiting foreign

investment and leading to complaints by citizens and businesses. Ho Chi Minh City decided to take up the challenge to improve public services, taking the first steps to create a one-stop shop. The initial key policy objectives of the one-stop shop were to:

- Serve as a clear, accessible, and recognizable entry point for people who need administrative services;
- Increase transparency and clarity of service regulations, procedures, and fees;
- Improve the quality and effectiveness of administrative services; and
- Increase efficiency by streamlining the administrative procedures around service delivery, thereby saving time and money.

With the approval of the central government, Ho Chi Minh City launched the first one-stop shop in 1995 as an experiment. Its main link with the PAR program was its objective to streamline administrative procedures and to improve the processing of administrative documents for citizens and businesses. Due to its success, the initiative quickly spread throughout the city and soon after to several other provinces (see box 1).

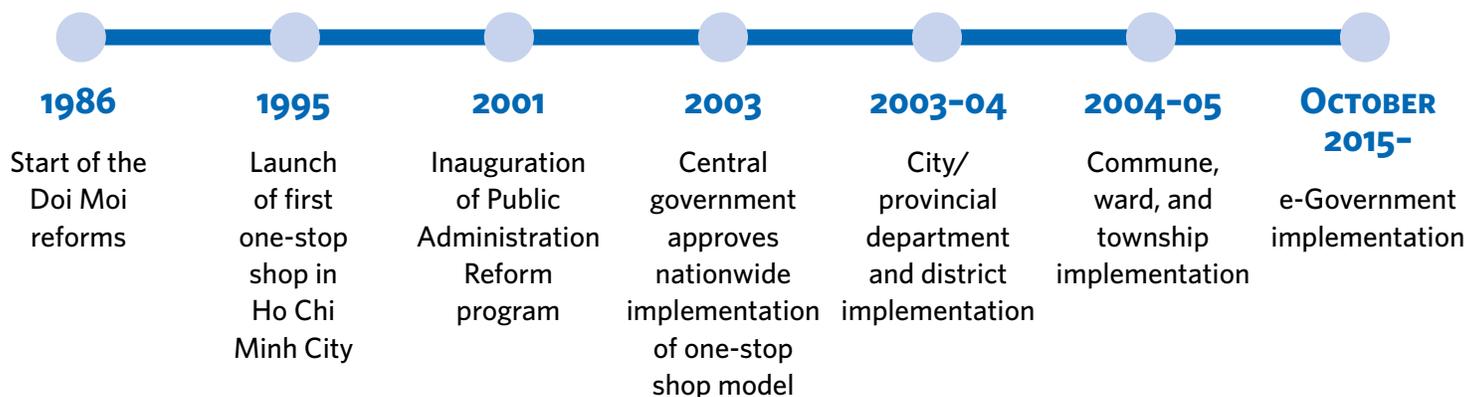
The central government approved the one-stop shop model for nationwide implementation, and it became a formal part of PAR in 2003.² Championed at the highest political levels, particularly by the prime minister,³ the one-stop shop model was expanded into a national program targeted at areas of the country that had not yet adopted it, with the objective of ensuring even coverage and standard of services (see figure 1). The one-stop shop model has since been

2. See Decision No. 93/2007/QĐ-TTg, replacing decision 181/2003/QĐ-TTg (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2007, 2003) and Decision No. 09/2015/QĐ-TTg (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2015), replacing decision 93/2007/QĐ-TTg (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2015, 2007).

3. In the one-stop-shop one-year implementation report (MoHA 2004) Minister Trung notes: “Public administration reform (PAR) is a complicated mission. To achieve the expected outcomes of PAR, it is important to create a synchronous reform of the whole political system at local levels, an intensified advocacy campaign and a strong determination from executive agencies to the central government. There is indeed a severe battle against lingering stagnancy and conservatism to produce a public administration which is democratic, transparent, strong and modernised.”

1. Resolution No. 38/CP of 5.4.1994: “Resolution of Government on Reform: One Step Forward of Public Administrative Procedures by Solving Matters of Citizens and Organizations.”

Figure 1. Implementing One-stop Shops: Key Milestones



considered the most successful PAR-related effort under the Doi Moi strategy.

The objectives outlined in a 2015 decision by the prime minister are very much in line with the vision carried out by Vietnam's one-stop shops:

"Developing a people-oriented administration:

- Service by state administration agencies improved;
- Higher responsibility of the head and performing cadres and public servants;

- Inconveniences and harassments by public servants prevented; and
- Individuals and organizations as implementing partners" (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2015).

In 2016, Vietnam's 63 provinces comprised 1,106 provincial-level departments; 702 districts; and 10,830 communes, wards, and townships operating one-stop shops—a total of 12,638 one-stop shops.

Box 1. Piloting the One-door Model in Ho Chi Minh City—the Experimental Phase

In 1995, Ho Chi Minh City asked the central government for permission to pilot a "one door, one seal" model for urban districts 1 and 5 and the Cu Chi rural district. The initial goal was to improve service delivery, primarily for businesses, with a view toward increasing investment, particular foreign investment. The initial idea for one-stop shops came from foreign investors who had experience with such systems in Western Europe, particularly in the EU countries and EU accession countries of the 1990s. As an economic hub of Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh City was strongly motivated to maintain its status as the most dynamic city in the country, clearly contributing to its embrace of the model. In 1997, the city administration sent the central government a report on the results of its pilot and asked that it be expanded to all other districts of the city. Between 1996 and 1998, nine provinces followed the one-stop shop model to overcome similar difficulties, and by 2003, 35 provinces were operating one-stop shops at 196 provincial departments; 160 districts; and 905 communes, wards, and townships.

Legal Basis

The hierarchy of legal instruments in Vietnam is broadly mirrored at the local level, and therefore the people's committees of the provincial and self-governing cities—i.e., the executive arm of the provincial governments (see box 2)⁴—introduced one-stop shops in their areas under the context of taking action on public administration reform. However, since PAR and one-stop shops also entailed revising governmental structures and administrative procedures, prime minister decisions, which have the full force of law, were utilized as the legal basis for one-stop shop implementation. Among the first major decisions of the prime minister were to allow Ho Chi Minh City to pilot one-stop shops in Districts 1, 5, and Cu Chi district in 1995, and a pilot one-stop shop in the whole city (communes, districts, and city departments) in 1998. These decisions were followed by further regulations governing one-stop shops:

- Decision 181/2003/QĐ-TTg, September 4, 2003, promulgating the regulation on implementation of “one-door” mechanism in local state administrative agencies;
- Decision No. 93/2007/QĐ-TTg, June 22, 2007, promulgating the regulation on implementation of one-stop shops and interagency one-stop shop mechanisms in local state administrative agencies; and
- Decision No. 09/2015/QĐ-TTg March 25, 2015, replacing the 2007 decision.

These actions helped ensure that one-stop shops were adopted on a national scale in a comprehensive and standardized way. One decision by the prime minister required all provinces and districts to begin implementing one-stop shops for their local administrative agencies on January 1, 2004; and all communes, wards, and townships a year later. Planning for this began in 2003. National implementation in provinces and districts began in March 2004 and was almost completed within a year. Implementation at the commune, ward, and township level began in March 2005, and there too, implementation was nearly completed by the

Box 2. Local Government Institutions

People's councils represent the local authority of the state; they are the head supervisory bodies for each level of government. Council members are popularly elected—although candidates are screened by the Party—and are responsible for ensuring strict local observance of the constitution and laws as well as for ruling on local plans and budgets. The councils do not govern directly; instead, they elect and oversee people's committees.

People's committees act as executive bodies and carry out local administrative duties. They are elected by the people's councils.

Source: <http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-14710.html>.

end of the year. Guidance on legal requirements pertaining to implementation, including organization, procedures, coverage, staffing, training, and financing, was formulated and distributed to all ministries, provinces, and self-governing cities, and from there to departments, districts, communes, wards, and townships.

2. Current Status of One-stop Shops

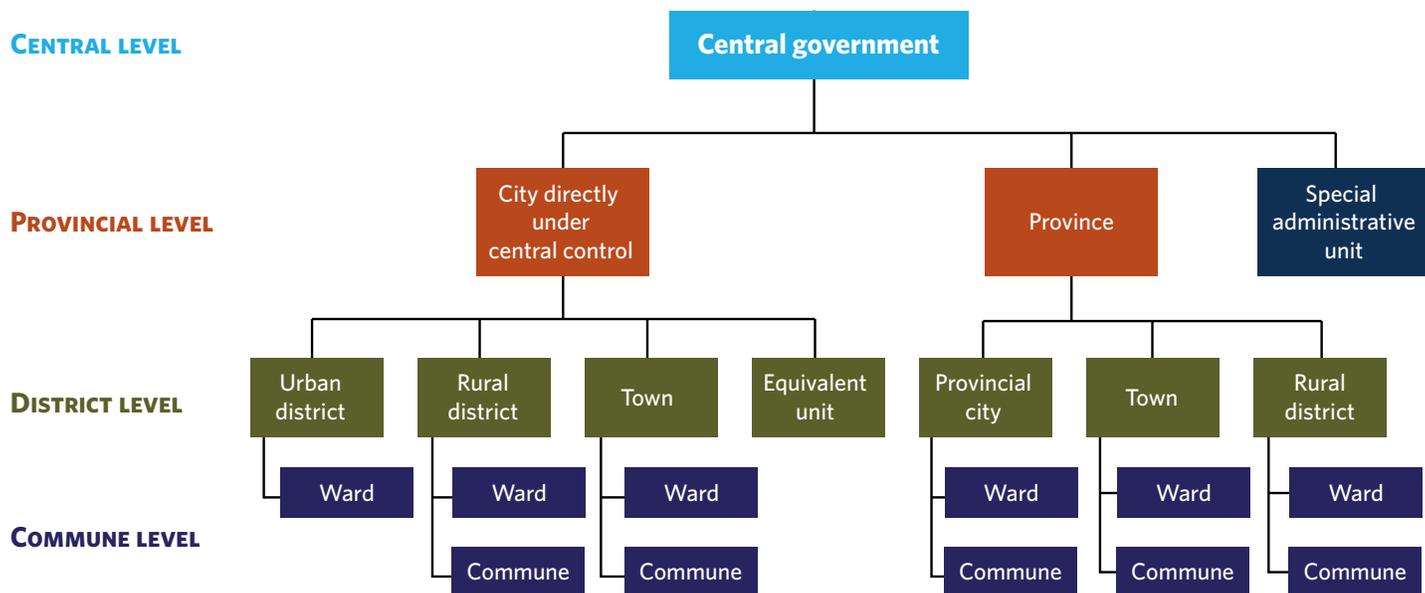
Levels of Service Delivery

Vietnam is a unitary state with a four-tier government composed of national, provincial, district, and communal levels. The provincial level comprises provinces and cities that are directly under the central government; the district level comprises districts, towns, and provincial cities; and the communal level comprises communes, wards, and townships (see figure 2).

One-stop shops at various levels of government have complementary responsibilities. Provincial-level departments provide certain services not available at the district or commune level due to their specialty or province-wide nature or importance (e.g., major capital investment operations). Districts conduct the bulk of service delivery through

4. The equivalent of local or regional executive bodies in other countries.

Figure 2. Administrative Divisions in Vietnam



one-stop shops. Communes, wards, and townships provide simpler, lower-level services and act as advisory, collection, transfer and referral points for some services carried out at the district level.

Provincial-level one-stop shops are usually associated with the work of a single department; but people's committees have implemented multipurpose interagency one-stop shops at the district and commune level.⁵

Service Channels

One-stop shop implementation comprised three phases: an experimental/piloting phase (1995 to 2003), a phase focused on provincial- and district-level shops (2004), and

one focused on commune-level shops (2005). During the experimental phase, 196 provincial departments and 160 districts covering 35 provinces began operating one-stop shops.

By October 2004, one-stop shop implementation had significantly expanded:

- Among provinces and self-governing cities, 63 out of 64 had adopted the one-stop shop model;
- Among provincial departments, 147 out of 256 (57.4 percent) had opened their one-stop shop to comply with the legal requirements;
- Also among provincial departments, 510 out of 1,523 (40.2 percent), voluntarily implemented the one-stop shop model;
- Among districts, 564 out of 659 (85.58 percent) had begun operating one-stop shops;

5. The authors would like to point out that an analysis of "simple" one-stop shops (dealing with procedures within the administrative competence of only one agency) versus interagency/interlinked one-stop shops (dealing with procedures within the administrative competence of several administrative agencies) could be undertaken to compare and contrast the chronological development and enrichment of these two models in terms of philosophy/theory, practice, and maturing policies on the part of the government of Vietnam. However, this goes beyond the scope of the present undertaking, which merely aims to present an overview of the general concept and model adopted to facilitate one-stop service delivery in Vietnam.

- Among communes, wards, and townships,⁶ 1,223 out of 10,751 (11.37 percent) had already applied the model prior to the mandatory adoption date; and
- At the provincial and district levels, 25 provinces and cities had already introduced the one-stop shop mechanism in all agencies (MoHA 2004).

By the end of 2005, many more provincial-level departments and districts and a large majority of the communes, wards, and townships had also adopted the model. As of May 2015, there were one-stop shops in 1,106 (88.3 percent) provincial-level departments; 702 districts (98.6 percent); 10,830 communes, wards, and townships (96.7 percent). All these are integrated, interagency one-stop shops, organized vertically to provide services (MoHA 2015).

In other words, a considerable number of one-stop shops at all levels were already operational by the end of 2005; by 2015, the numbers had grown to almost complete coverage. By May 2015, there were 12,638 one-stop shops operating. Of the possible 13,164 one-stop shops, 526 (4 percent) were not yet operating, primarily due to remoteness (communes, wards, and townships) or lack of customer demand (provincial departments).

A few one-stop shops are experimenting with e-service delivery, but, currently, all services are provided in person through dedicated offices, which are usually located at or near the provincial, district-, or commune-level people's committee headquarters. All one-stop shop offices host websites that provide information about services provided, costs, timeframes, and instructions for application and application forms for the various administrative procedures. In addition, there is a dedicated one-stop shop telephone help-line in each locality.

6. Communes are in rural areas; wards in urban areas; and townships (small towns) are the lowest formal level of government in Vietnam.

Types of Services

Some services provided by one-stop shops at various levels are prescribed nationally; other services are optional and determined locally. National services are:

- Notary—notarized copies of deeds and official papers;
- Social affairs—social insurance, welfare services, senior citizens and invalids, and civil status registration;
- Land administration—exchange and transfer of land use rights and designation of land use;⁷
- Business licensing—issuance and changes in business licenses;
- Construction permits—licenses for and inspection of different forms of construction; and
- Local tax collection and fees.

Optional services encompass a wide range of specialty and supplementary services, including:

- Issuing medical/pharmaceutical practice certificates;
- Issuing karaoke business licenses;
- Issuing travel business licenses;
- Issuing veterinarian licenses; and
- Culture and information services.

Implementing Agencies

The initial experimental phase was led by the people's committee of Ho Chi Minh City and, subsequently, by other provincial-level people's committees. Funding and staff was provided by the involved province or city.

The main implementation phase (2003–06) was coordinated by the PAR Department and its multidevelopment partner-funded project, located within the Ministry of Home

7. In Vietnam, all land is owned by the state; however, the sale, exchange, or transfer of land-use rights or change in land use is conducted in a way that is similar to other countries. Indeed, the state's ability to forcibly take over land already allocated to an individual or entity is often considerably more difficult than in many other countries.

Affairs (MoHA) and answerable to the PAR government steering committee, which was chaired by the minister of MoHA. Costs for setting up the one-stop shops, including equipment, technical assistance, and staff training, were covered by a combination of government and development partner funds and staffing. Development partners supporting the one-stop shops included the Swiss Development Cooperation, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and bilateral development agencies from Denmark, Norway, and Sweden.

The operational phase from 2006 onward was and continues to be managed by each national and local government entity and monitored by MoHA through an established system of annual statistical reports and public surveys.

Services Provided

Two hundred and thirty administrative procedures can be conducted at the commune level, 380 administrative procedures at the district level, and 50–120 administrative procedures at the provincial level. By regulation, all administrative procedures for individuals and organizations must be processed through a department or interagency one-stop shop.

Commune-level one-stop shops process an average of around 5,000 transactions per year; for district-level one-stop shops, the number is around 10,000. However, some one-stop shops are busier than others, and there is a wide variation between them. The one-stop shops with the most transaction processing include District 1 of Ho Chi Minh City (150,000 transactions per year), Thai Nguyen City (125,000); Bo Trach district of Quang Binh province (88,052); Pleiku City of Gia Lai province (87,815); Di An Town of Binh Duong province (77,583); and Quy Nhon City of Binh Dinh province (58,249).

The Role of Ministries and Agencies

One-stop shops operate under the direct management of ministries that are responsible for the respective transactions carried out with individuals and businesses, including the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Agriculture and

Rural Development, Ministry of Public Security, Ministry of Planning and Investment, Ministry of Home Affairs, and Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. By 2015, all administrative services could be accessed through one-stop shop entities.

Human Rights Principles

One-stop shops cater to the needs of marginalized and vulnerable populations by facilitating access to social services. Easier access to information has helped reduce conflicts and problems in land management. Provincial competitiveness surveys show that the process for issuing land-user right certificates has improved significantly.

Services provided by one-stop shops strengthen the state's ability to guarantee human rights, such as the right to social security as defined in Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Articles 26: "every child has the right to benefit from social security, including social insurance," and Article 27 "states parties must ... take appropriate measures to assist parents to implement this right and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programs, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing"; and the right to birth registration as defined in Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Article 7(1): "The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality."

In addition, there are systems in place to guarantee equality and nondiscrimination in public service delivery, and the one-stop shop model with its extensive geographical coverage implies that every citizen and business is entitled to public services and should be able to access them equally. This idea is reinforced with an automatic queuing system.

One-stop shops reinforce the transparency and accountability of state institutions to citizens. Through the introduction of one-stop shops, access to information about service entitlements has been greatly improved. Every one-stop shop operates a comments/complaints system, which allows citizens and businesses to voice their opinions about the level

of service received and to seek administrative recourse when necessary. The one-stop shops are regularly inspected by people's committee and people's council members and are subject to annual statistical monitoring and public surveys.

Collaboration with Other Organizations

The one-stop shop model benefited from the support of the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) in the early 2000s. In 2000, SDC promoted the one-stop shop model in a single town and a single province. Following their success, eight provinces and over 90 districts requested SDC support to open or improve a one-stop shop. SDC supported the establishment of 78 shops and the improvement of 25 others. In 2002, SDC supported the Ministry of Home Affairs in assessing and evaluating all of the one-stop shop pilot models in the country, as well as developing recommendations for their nationwide replication. It worked with other line ministries to streamline and decentralize service delivery procedures, allowing for the provision of additional services at district one-stop shops. SDC also provided assistance to local authorities to facilitate the replication process of district one-stop shops, their continuous improvement, and service expansion. The support was primarily focused on poor provinces, especially the mountainous regions with populations comprising a large percentage of ethnic minorities. In concert with other donors, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), and the Danish International Development Agency (Danida), SDC support covered three types of activities at the provincial level:

- Establishment—the introduction of the one-stop shop concept to local authorities, facilitation of the preparations for establishment, and provision of basic equipment and training;
- Improvement—the development and application of a performance monitoring system, compilation of operational guidelines, staff training, the facilitation of the introduction of new services, and facility upgrading; and
- Enhanced coordination—input on the strategy for nationwide replication, contributions to the support package for implementation, facilitation of national assessment, and dissemination of lessons learned.

During the main implementation phase (2004–06) a number of development partners, primarily those supporting the multidonor PAR Support Project administered by UNDP, provided funds to support one-stop shop implementation, however, this represented a small proportion of the overall resources needed.

3. Setting-up the One-Stop Shops

Institutional Framework

The PAR Steering Committee determined the initial responsibilities for implementation. The minister of MoHA and the ministers who would be responsible for the provision of mandatory services were charged with overseeing the overall policy, coordination, and monitoring of the one-stop shops. The people's committees at the provincial, district, and commune level and agency heads were tasked with the practical implementation and management of local variations in line with overall national standards. Article 15 of the prime minister's regulation on one-stop shops from 2003 states that:

“Chairpersons of people's committees of central cities and provinces are responsible for supervising and organizing the implementation of “one-stop” shop mechanism at the levels of province and district from January 1st, 2004, and at communal level from January 1st, 2005. Annual reports on progress made and lessons learnt will be developed and sent to the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Ministry of Home Affairs will summarize a report to be submitted to the Prime Minister” (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2003).

The local people's committees enjoy a fairly substantial degree of autonomy with regard to the one-stop shops, including approving changes to the organization, e.g., the

addition of new services; approving changes in staff composition within minimum national standards; deciding on budget issues; and supervising the one-stop shops' team leaders. The committees conduct monitoring visits to the one-stop shops, and are authorized to refer issues and ideas concerning one-stop shops and services to higher administrative levels for resolution.

To facilitate the implementation of one-stop shops at the local level, a guide was developed, which included all relevant national legal instruments and templates for local regulations. It provided guidance on the preparation and establishment of the "request receiving and returning office," organization and working schedules, staff size, staff training, citizen communication strategy and methodologies, forms for various procedures, timeframes, charges to be applied, and necessary equipment schedules. The document was updated by the prime minister's Decision No. 9 (2015), which provides specifications for one-stop shops and integrated one-stop shop mechanisms at the local level. It defines the requirements and standards for one-stop shops at provincial, district, and commune levels in terms of service counter placement, standard space and equipment, and professional and ethical standards for staff.

During its full implementation phase, the one-stop shop model received considerable and widespread political support, and there was no significant resistance to its implementation, notably due to its being embedded into the Doi Moi, which had introduced a period of sustained change; increased pressure by citizens to improve service delivery and, particularly, to reduce corruption; and the positive role of the people's committees and councils at all levels. The chief barriers were logistical: implementing one-stop shops in sparsely populated areas was more challenging than in cities and towns, and for this reason, these areas were given special attention and support, for example for the procurement of motorbikes to transport administrative dossiers that were submitted in remote communes to district-level one-stop shops.

Processes

Service delivery processes have been streamlined in two ways. First, through PAR, an ongoing program was instituted to simplify administrative regulations,⁸ notably in the issuance of land-user rights certificates and tax administration. Second, the organization of one-stop shops included simplifying processes for citizens and businesses. Provincial-level one-stop shops provide one or more sets of integrated services. This "one door for one service" model allows citizens to visit a single office to submit their service delivery applications. Internal procedures are in place to then collect the appropriate approvals from the relevant bureaus. Citizens collect their documents at the same office.

District- and commune-level one-stop shops, where the vast majority of service delivery applications are processed, provide a range of services at one location. They receive and/or provide advice about applications before directing them to one or more service delivery channels. This "one door for many services" model allows customers to visit a single office to submit a service application, where they can also access a wide range of other services.

The primary responsibility for authorization and delivery of a mandatory or optional service remains at the level at which an application was made, although the commune level often acts in an advisory capacity and as a sort of mailbox for services authorized at the district level, particularly land administration issues. Frontline staff at one-stop shops at all levels receive and give advice about applications, but they do not authorize them—this is undertaken by the chain of administrative offices behind the front office, which receives applications and returns requested documents to citizens.

Funding and Costs

During the experimental phase, initial set-up costs were borne by the relevant cities and provinces. Subsequently, while most one-stop shop set-up costs were again borne by

8. "Project 30" sought to reduce administrative procedures by 30 percent as part of an ambitious reform agenda to modernize public service and to simplify the regulatory environment for businesses. See OECD (2007).

the cities, provinces, districts, communes, wards, and townships, in poorer areas costs were sometimes shared with development partners.

Fees for services paid in cash at the point of service and supplemented as needed by the general budget, determined at the various levels of one-stop shop operation, fund the day-to-day operations of the one-stop shops. Initially, the Ministry of Finance provided guidance on funding matters.⁹

Citizens are charged a set fee, usually nationally determined, for every provided service, which varies according to the type of service. The government stipulates the 130 charges and 171 fees in detail, which are posted at every one-stop shop and published on their websites. There are about 1,700–1,800 types of fees and charges regulated by provincial people’s councils; these are also posted at the one-stop shops. According to a law enacted in November 2015, the national assembly’s standing committee, the government, the minister of finance, and the provincial people’s councils have the authority to prescribe charges and fees; rates, exemptions, and reduction for poor applicants; and the collection, management, and use of the monies collected from charges and fees.

Information Technology and Digitization

One-stop shops in Vietnam have used computerized technology since their inception: at the time they were implemented, many records were already being digitized, although this was by no means standard or extensive. One-stop shop implementation added further momentum to the trend toward digitization, but often in a piecemeal and localized fashion (see box 3). Today, many one-stop shops have adopted modern communication tools, both to communicate across agencies and vertically with different levels of administration. Currently, most one-stop shop offices in charge of receiving dossiers and communicating results are using information

Box 3. Early Digitization of One-stop Shops: Computer Disks and Motorbikes

During the implementation of commune, ward, and township one-stop shops in Da Lat district, communes transmitted applications and linked data for approval to district-level departments by transferring computerized applications onto a computer disk and then sending the disk by motorbike to the district departments concerned. Approvals were sent back in the same way.

technology to disclose, guide, receive, and process records, and then return results to individuals and organizations. As of early 2016, one-stop shop offices using computerized tools to receive dossiers and provide results were operating in 343 out of 713 district administrative units.

The one-stop shops have been linked to the developing e-government strategy. The number of online public services at the district and commune levels is increasing. For example, a government Resolution from October 14, 2015 on e-government states that by the end of 2016, popular public services affecting many citizens and enterprises will be provided at the district level, and the option to pay any fees online will be available to users. Results will be returned to users online, in person, or sent by mail.

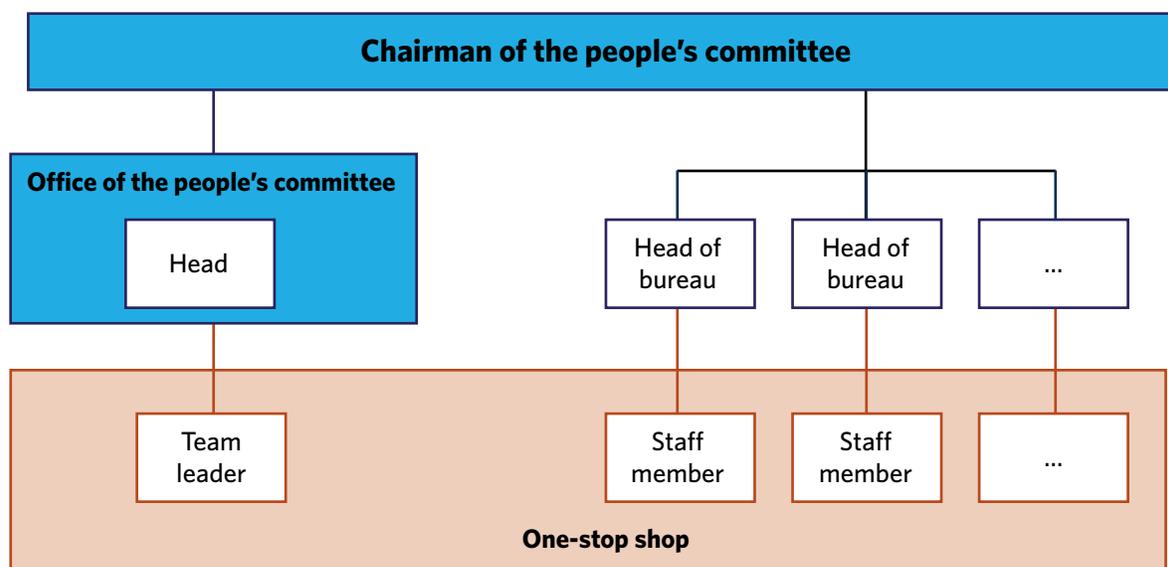
4. Staffing

Personnel

Staff numbers vary from one one-stop shop to another, according to the range of services provided. Front office staff numbers range from two at the commune level to 10 or more at large, multipurpose one-stop shops. Back office staff numbers also vary according to the quantity and complexity of provided services. There are no centrally held records regarding dedicated staff for one-stop shops, but a broad estimation suggests that there are approximately 22,000 commune-; 5,000 district-; and 4,500 province-level staff—a total of 31,500 persons acting as one-stop shop front desk staff.

9. “With regard to the financial regime for the implementation of PAR tasks in general, and for various government levels in applying the OSS mechanism in particular, it is suggested that the Ministry of Finance confirm the responsibility of government agencies at all levels in budgeting for PAR activities in general and for the OSS mechanism operation in particular, to ensure the sustainability of the mechanism” (One-Year Implementation Report, 2004).

Figure 3. Staff Organization in the Multifunctional One-stop Shop



Source: Based on SDC 2003.

These estimates do not include back office staff, whose numbers could be several times greater.

Staff Recruitment and Training

One-stop shop staff at all levels are civil service employees and are temporarily transferred from their line departments. Staffing, payment, and recruitment follow standard public sector rules for remuneration and recruitment. However, front-office staff in one-stop shops may receive supplemental salaries because they work directly with the public.

The government conducted trainings with one-stop shop staff during the initial implementation phase with the assistance of development partners. They focused on the basic concepts of the one-stop shop model, particularly aspects such as transparency, accountability, integrity, and customer orientation. Staff received the training enthusiastically. The curricula and training guides were made available at all levels of operating one-stop shops. The one-stop shops continue to conduct trainings of new staff as well as locally based refresher trainings.

Staff Structure and Operating Procedures

The organizational staff structure at a multifunctional one-stop shop is presented in figure 3. One-stop shop team leaders are answerable to the heads of the people's committee, staff members are answerable to bureau heads, and bureau heads are answerable to the chairman of the people's committee. Operational manuals are available for one-stop shops overall as well as for the operation of individual services. One-stop shop staff in functional departments (single-agency one-stop shops) are answerable to their head of bureau, who is, in turn, answerable to the chairman of the people's committee.

Incentives

Staff working at one-stop shops are often provided a supplement to their salaries at a flat rate that is unrelated to performance. In 2016, the salary supplement for public officials working in the front offices of one-stop shops was set at a monthly maximum of VND 400,000 per person (approximately \$US18). Provincial people's councils determine supplement levels in accordance with local budgets—usually less than the maximum allowable.

Elements that may impact the motivation of one-stop shop staff include annual performance assessments, the potential for customer complaints, and—especially—good leadership. One-stop shop staff are subject to the same annual performance assessments as all public sector staff. The threat of complaints (notably through the complaints system available at every one-stop shop) might also have an effect on staff motivation, particularly, that of the one-stop shop team leader. However, the threat of sanctions through established civil service disciplinary systems is not considered to be particularly effective at motivating better performance. What does motivate staff are good leaders. According to the first year implementation report:

“Leadership is an important factor in the implementation process. Any province in which the leaders show strong determination, great consideration and seriousness to the implementation of the Prime Minister’s Decision, recognizing the need for the reform of administrative procedures in dealing with people’s and organizations’ affairs, have also succeeded in steering and introducing the one-stop shop mechanism well” (MoHA 2004).

Overall, the determination and leadership provided by the people heading the one-stop shops has had a strong impact on the quality of services delivered and the speed of implementation.

Organizational Culture

Staff receive their pay on time, but rates of pay for civil servants are somewhat low, making it more difficult to attract quality candidates.

The overarching mission of the one-stop shop model was formulated during the planning stage for full-scale implementation and was communicated to staff and to citizens. The mission statement remains posted at every one-stop shop and is published on the one-stop shop websites and through other avenues.

Transparency, accountability, integrity, and customer orientation are important aspects of the one-stop shop culture; and staff tends to strongly identify with the mission and its objectives. The code of ethics applicable to one-stop shops is the same as that of public service generally.

5. Operating One-stop Shops

Launch

In the initial experimentation phase of one-stop shops, participating cities and provinces formulated their own communication strategies to keep the general public and staff informed regarding their development.

A broad national and local communication strategy was implemented as nationwide one-stop shop implementation began. At the national level, the prime minister and senior ministers publicized the one-stop shops on television and other news events, including a weekly one-hour PAR-dedicated television and radio program, which is broadcast during peak times. National newspapers were encouraged by the central government to run stories on one-stop shops, and a competition was held for the best news stories. These efforts were mirrored and expanded upon by similar local-level events, including provincial television and radio channels, local newspapers, and other dedicated events, such as opening ceremonies. It is unlikely that the implementation of one-stop shops escaped the attention of many citizens.

The campaigns were very successful in terms of raising awareness of the one-stop shops and creating a positive association about them in the minds of the general public. As a result, the one-stop shop is a strong brand, despite the absence of a nationwide logo. Some local one-stop shops have developed their own logos.

Communication continues to be an important aspect of one-stop shop policy. All forms, timeframes, and fees are posted at the one-stop shops and published on their websites. The development of websites served as a precursor

to the conversion to e-government systems, but they are rarely used as customers continue to prefer to directly ask a one-stop shop officer or someone else about procedures in person or through the dedicated one-stop shop telephone helpline.

Both national and local communication strategies emphasize the targeting of vulnerable groups. In the Vietnam context, this usually concerns 60+ ethnic minority groups, many living in geographically remote areas and among the most impoverished populations in the country. These strategies did not emerge out of one-stop shops; they are in keeping with the broader government policy, which includes special programs for ethnic minorities. Therefore, for example, communications were tailored to minority ethnic groups in their own languages.

Operational Aspects

There are nationally governed operational guidelines and strategies in place, such as minimum space requirements for one-stop shop front offices: 40 square meters (m²) at the province level, 80 m² at the district level, and 40 m² at the commune level (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2015). Regulations also cover the equipment for the unit, such as information technology and specialized equipment; and specify sufficient conditions for performing online public services through application of one-stop shop software. There are clear guidelines on the requirements, responsibilities, rights, benefits, and management of public servants. Guidance is regularly updated to take account of improved practices and changing conditions.

Challenges to Implementation

Since 2004, a system of regular monitoring has helped identify problems earlier than was previously possible, but challenges persist, for example:

- Several administrative procedures are cumbersome and need simplification;
 - More than 12 years after becoming national policy, the one-stop shop model is still not fully implemented, although national coverage rates are high;
 - The strong focus on transparency and accountability has reduced rent-seeking opportunities in administrative service delivery, and because of this, there is a level of resistance to implementation;
 - The quality of one-stop shops and interagency one-stop shops in several local areas remains uneven and in some places is characterized by a narrow concern for formal rules;
 - Competency levels among public employees at one-stop shops remains insufficient, and additional training is needed in areas such as information technology skills, the policy framework, and internal coordination;
 - In some places, the missing option of online file transmission and delays due to postal transfers at interagency one-stop shops slow down the transfer of files between administrative levels;
 - The conditions required to ensure one-stop shop and interagency one-stop shop implementation are still limited due to poor facilities and insufficient human resources; and
 - The number of online public services at the district and commune levels remains low.
- Despite the clear political support for the one-stop shop model expressed by top state administrators, in 2006, it was noted at the Tenth Communist Party Congress that the apparatus of state governance at multiple levels, but particularly at the grassroots level, was still weak, and that the behavior of some public employees was still inadequate, especially at agencies working directly with the public. Overly bureaucratic procedures and lack of discipline were also recognized as existing challenges.

Box 4. Improvements due to the One-stop Shop Model

Examples of improvements and simplifications due to the one-stop shop model include:

- Business registration, which used to take up to 35 days, now only takes five days at an integrated one-stop shop.
- Fees for the notarization of births and other registrations are now made public to ensure transparency and to prevent corruption.
- Citizens used to have to travel long distances and spend days obtaining permits, but they can now obtain construction permits at the commune-level within a couple of kilometers from their commune.

The same Congress agreed that part of the remedies would include to:

- Design and improve a system of policies guaranteeing essential and equal public services to all citizens.
- Build a democratic society where Party cadres and members and public employees are genuine servants of the people.
- Identify forms of organization and adopt mechanisms for the people to exercise their democratic rights in the economic, political, cultural, and social fields; and to join hands in common affairs of the Party, state, and society.
- Uphold the sense of accountability of Party and state organizations to the people.
- Drastically delegate and even more proactively decentralize to local authorities, especially in relation to making decisions on budgeting, finance, investment, human resources, and fulfillment of fiscal obligations to the central government.

- Build a system of clean, strong, democratic, disciplinary, justice- and human rights-protecting judiciary agencies.
- Raise the operational quality of people's councils and people's committees, ensuring local authorities' rights of autonomy and self-accountability within their assigned jurisdictions.
- Promote the role of people's councils in oversight. Rationally organize local authorities, and redelineate lines of power for the authorities in rural and urban areas, and islands.

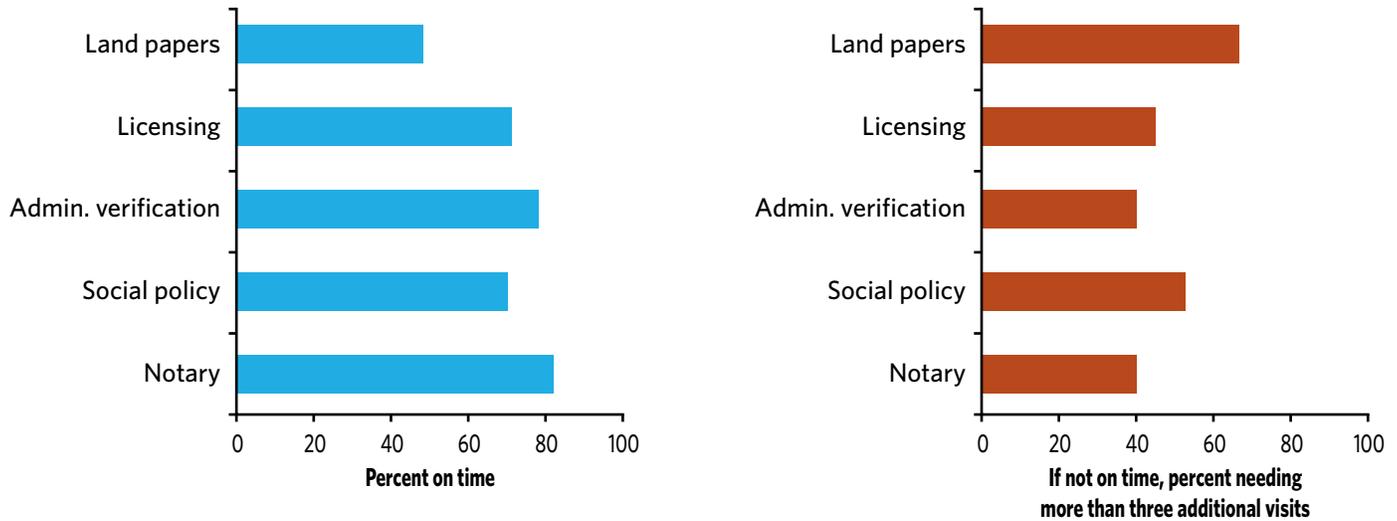
Successes with Implementation

Key achievements of the one-stop shop model include:

- **Transforming the attitudes of public servants toward the public.** The introduction of a customer care philosophy radically changed relations between the government and the people; and this effect has spilled over into public service in general, becoming the societal norm.
- **Reducing bureaucracy, inefficiencies, and rent seeking.** Citizens and businesses have experienced a considerable reduction in inconvenience, time, effort, and financial resources required to reach their objectives. Records show a higher ratio of timely settlement of work, and many outdated or unnecessarily complex procedures have been simplified (see box 4).
- **Improving quality.** The quality of service at one-stop shops continues to improve; and the frequency of complaints received regarding fees for services is declining. Improvements are most visible at integrated one-stop shops, where more services are provided. For citizens and firms, the prospect of long lines and unanswered questions are much less of a concern now than in the past, and this significantly promotes local socioeconomic development.

From the citizen's perspective, these reports of improvements come with caveats. The administrative burden for some complex procedures remains high. Facilities are often

Figure 4. On-Time Performance at One-Stop Shops in Dak Lak



Source: Viet Insight 2009.

inadequate, especially in poorer rural communes, and a lack of full-time staff can still cause delays and frustration. In the survey of one-stop shop users in Dak Lak, most reported that they were generally able to carry out the requested transaction, but many reported that the procedures did not match the timeframes called for by regulations (figure 4). In the case of land papers, in 2009, more than half of respondents said procedures were not completed on time, and more than half of those said it took at least three additional visits to finalize the procedure.

One-stop shops are continually developing. Localized improvements are frequent and often copied. On a national scale, the movement from single subject one-stop shops to integrated interagency one-stop shops, and the subsequent, continuous development of increasingly sophisticated computerized records and the use of other technology, such as automated queuing systems and interactive computer information display systems, shows how the culture of one-stop shops has taken hold. The one-stop shop model is now

moving toward Internet based e-government systems that will have access to the data necessary to eventually allow customers to conduct transactions without even having to visit a one-stop shop.

6. Citizen-centeredness of the One-stop Shops

Accessibility and Architecture

One-stop shops are either situated in a distinct part of an existing government office or in a separate, purpose-built or converted building. Because there are one-stop shops in every rural commune and in every ward in a city, no one lives more than a few miles away. The one-stop shops normally keep standard government working hours: 7:30 a.m.–4:00 p.m. Monday through Friday as well as Saturday mornings. One-stop shop citizen charters are established at the national level, and service standards are published in every

Box 5. The Implementation of One-Stop Shops in Dak Lak Province

The people's committee and the Embassy of Denmark organized a user satisfaction survey of one-stop shops in 14 districts and 30 communes of the province of Dak Lak to better understand citizens' perceptions of the one-stop shop model. Based on the views of 1,825 respondents and an additional set of in-depth interviews and group discussions with about 300 citizens in the spring of 2009, the research design included a control group of communes outside of the public administration reform project area. The study provides a valuable snapshot of how the one-stop shop operates in this central highlands province.

Results were generally encouraging, with 80 percent of respondents happy with the changes in public administration within their communes, particularly the one-stop shop model. Respondents appreciated services such as the issuing of official documents, such as identification cards, licenses, and permits, among other items. The researchers found that this had helped restore trust in the local government in rural communities, especially among ethnic minorities. According to one respondent, "The attitude has changed a lot. Previously, they never answered any question, and many ethnic people departed immediately if they did not receive an answer. But now the officers are much nicer." However, the study also found room for improvement in many communes regarding the sense of responsibility, competency, morality, and attitude of one-stop shop officers.

The convenience and simplicity of the one-stop shop model saves people from having to go to many locations as in the past and enables the poor and those who do not speak the Kinh language to access administrative services without having to pay for others to help. Despite clear improvements compared with result of an earlier survey in 2006, 20 percent of respondents still needed help from others to complete necessary paperwork, and one in 10 users of a one-stop shop employed a middleman. A small proportion—5 to 6 percent—also paid an extra "fee," (bribe) beyond the customary fees.

While the one-stop shop model is a potential time-saver for citizens, in practice, this depends on the complexity of the task. Land transactions take the longest amount of time, as illustrated by the story of one respondent:

"Our family has several plots of land and when our children went to college, we decided to sell some plots of land for college fees and living costs. However, to complete the procedure for land transfer, one-stop shop officers at both commune and district asked me for many kinds of papers such as Certificate of Origin of Land and other kinds of certifications. I had to travel many times and spend months for this—at least two to four months. So in fact, in some cases, after we fulfilled the requirements, no more buyers could wait."

Problems can be compounded if one-stop shop staff work part-time or do not maintain their posted hours. One respondent describing an attempt to get a birth certificate for a newborn said:

"I had to come there five times from Monday to Thursday but could not see them a single day so I stayed home on Friday. On the following Monday, I came for a regular weekly meeting at the commune and saw them and the paper was completed at once."

On the whole, however, improvements are evident. When they were first established in 2006, only 60 percent of respondents were satisfied with the convenience offered by the one-stop shops, but by 2009, almost 80 percent expressed satisfaction.

one-stop shop and website and on a national basis. Front and often back offices are fully visible to customers.

Citizen Engagement

Citizen feedback is continuously collected through the mandatory complaints and comments system operating in all one-stop shops. Less frequently, provincial administrations conduct formal independent surveys that tend to target potential areas of geographic or functional concerns (see box 5). Citizens also approach officials on provincial-, district- and commune-level people's committees and their representatives on people's councils with comments and complaints. This feedback is used to improve local-level operations and, through governmental reports, to alert the central government of the need for changes or further guidance. In addition, Vietnam's government operates a national system of "complaints and denunciations," whereby any citizen can lodge a complaint about their treatment or accuse officials of acting beyond their powers or corruptly.

The legal framework for lodging complaints is somewhat complicated because it is regulated at the national level, but also by type of service delivered, such as land administration (see box 6).

Partnerships

Development partners, in addition to funding infrastructure for the initial one-stop shop implementation, have engaged with the government to conduct monitoring of one-stop shops, particularly by funding public opinion surveys on select provincial one-stop shops.

The private sector, through their representative bodies, and civil society organizations monitor and offer suggestions for improvements to one-stop shop operations. The media also acts as a safeguard by bringing to light inefficiencies and corrupt practices.

7. Measuring Results and Performance

Key Performance Indicators

Waiting times and the timeframe for processing requests are national standards and therefore key performance indicators. The level of demand for each type of service is monitored on a local basis; and, accordingly, appropriate changes in operational procedures and staffing are made. Annual reports are published and made available to the media.

The introduction of one-stop shops had an immediate and notable effect on reducing the occurrence of corruption, improving efficiency in service provision, and establishing transparent and standard costs for services. Periodic independent user surveys specifically addressed these issues and have contributed to improvements. Continuing evidence from complaints systems tends to confirm this: there are increasingly fewer complaints about service provision concerning corruption, inefficiencies, or costs.

Statistics on citizen satisfaction, perception, and service efficiency drawn from surveys and complaints/comments systems similarly show how service users warmly welcomed the initial introduction of the one-stop shop model. One-stop shops continue to innovate and improve their service delivery as user expectations continue to rise.

Monitoring Mechanisms

The Ministry of Home Affairs established a central monitoring mechanism early on and undertook monitoring visits during the implementation phase. Since then, an annual report detailing statistics about one-stop shop activity is compiled by the Ministry. Provinces conduct their own monitoring of one-stop shop activity on an ongoing basis.

The government also operates the PAR index system, through which local areas rate their own performance. The evaluation of local-level services is performed by public officials using the results of surveys of individuals and organizations as well as feedback received through suggestion boxes, email, and other sources.

Box 6. The Current System of Settling Land-Related Administrative Complaints: Some Constraints

The current system used to settle administrative complaints is regulated by the 2012 Law on Complaints. Under this law, individuals and organizations are entitled to lodge complaints against administrative decisions at all levels of government. Complaints are settled by the chairperson of the local government against which the complaint is lodged. After the first settlement, the complainant can also escalate the complaint to higher-level government authorities, including heads of ministerial units and ministers, or they can initiate a lawsuit. The prime minister provides direction for the settlement of complaints and retains the power to reexamine final settlement decisions. The government inspectorate provides assistance and advice to all government authorities in charge of settling complaints.

The 2012 law mandates strict time limits for the settlement of complaints, and the 2004 and 2012 implementing guidelines of the Land Law require local governments to publicize decisions on the settlement of land-related complaints and to notify concerned complainants about those decisions.

The Land Law restricts the right of complainants to lodge land-related complaints in courts by making final the second-settlement decisions by the chairpersons of provincial people's committees. This restriction was also incorporated in the 2006 amendment of the Ordinance on the Procedures for the Settlement of Administrative Cases, in apparent contradiction of the Law on Complaints and Denunciations, which, since 2005, allows judicial review after complaints have been dealt with by any administrative agency.

The national assembly and people's councils have the mandate to monitor the settlement of complaints by the government. Complainants are entitled to send their complaints to the national assembly and people's councils, but these institutions can only urge competent government authorities to quickly settle the complaint.

Sources: Law on Complaints (2012); Land Law (2013); and Ordinance on the Procedures for the Settlement of Administrative Cases (1996, amended in 1998 and 2006).

With national and provincial government assistance, the World Bank and the government of Vietnam have undertaken two public surveys on one-stop shop operations in selected provinces: a citizens' report card survey in 2003–04 and user feedback surveys introduced in four pilot provinces in 2014–15 (see Davidsen and Turk 2005 and Davidsen 2015). These surveys focused on citizen-centric aspects of service delivery, including waiting times, the condition of the one-stop shops, and staff performance in relation to customers.

Results from the two surveys demonstrated that increasing transparency in administrative service delivery, such as making increased use of visible notice boards located outside of one-stop shops, could help identify specific and simple solutions to bottlenecks.

The Way Forward

The government of Vietnam has plans to continue expanding the adoption of one-stop shops and interconnected one-stop shops in units under ministries, ministerial-level agencies, government agencies, public service delivery units, and state enterprises that perform many administrative procedures relating to individuals and organizations. It also plans to further improve the quality and efficiency of the one-stop shops and replicate modern procedures of receiving dossiers and providing results. Plans also include enhancing the implementation of online public services.

One-stop shop implementation in Vietnam has demonstrated that the model cannot be introduced in a policy vacuum: it must be part of a larger governmental change process and benefit from political support. A critical factor in sustaining and expanding this service model continues to be the fact that the one-stop shop roll out in Vietnam was closely linked with the broader objective of the government's public administration reforms: to modernize the public administration and improve services to citizens and firms. Clear organizational structure, decentralization of decision-making and action, as well as the delegation of human resources, revenues and expenditures are necessary elements to allow a one-stop shop to prosper.¹⁰ One-stop shops also require significant capital investment in facilities and technology, and they work best when they are linked with the simplification of existing procedures and systems. Finally, there is a need for clear incentives to allow the one-stop shop model to work because it promotes a significant reduction in rent-seeking opportunities.

In conclusion, the one-stop shop model in Vietnam has clearly contributed to reinforcing the rights of citizens by providing an efficient and easy-to-access portal to government administrative services with standardized, published, and transparent fees, charges, and timeframes. Further, the model has stimulated the beginnings of a right to service delivery; a right to customer care, and freedom from harassment and corrupt practices. This philosophy has expanded into forms of service delivery connected with citizens' rights, such as land, housing, business registration and development, health, education, and a citizen complaint mechanism, ensuring that an ever-increasing number of citizens and organizations are treated respectfully and with care.

10. Decentralization was seen as a necessary tool to encourage one-stop shops: "Central Ministries and sectors should quickly accelerate the decentralization process in accordance with Resolution No. 08/CP, which will facilitate the replication of the OSS mechanism at all levels" (MoHa 2004).

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