Review

Public administration reform in Vietnam: Current situations and solutions

Ngo Thanh Can

Faculty of Organization and Personnel Management, National Academy of Public Administration, Vietnam. E-mail: canngothanh@yahoo.com.

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Vietnam is a developing country in the world, in which there are many developed countries with dynamic economy, flexible and competitive public administration. Vietnam has changed in economy as well as, public administration in order to take part in the process of globalization. More than past 10 years, Vietnam had carried out Public Administration Reform (PAR) with the main goal: “be successfully building a democratic, strong, clean, professionalized, modernized, effective and efficient public administration system which operates in line with the principles of the socialist ruled-by-law State under the leadership of the Party; the contingent of cadres, civil servants will have appropriate capacities and ethical qualities able to respond to the requirements of the national building and development”. PAR master programme in the phase 2001 to 2010 in Vietnam consists of: 9 objectives, 4 contents, 5 solutions and 7 plans. The results of implementation of PAR are to make a big change in public administration from traditional Public administration with centralization, bureaucracy and ineffectiveness to the public administration with dynamic modernization and effectiveness. However, there were many weaknesses and shortcomings of implementation of PAR in the phase 2001 to 2010 in organizing Government machinery, building public administration institutional, reforming public finance and specially, developing quality of cadres, civil servants, who play a decided role in implementation of PAR. Look up for future, 2011 to 2020, Vietnam has PAR Master Programme in the phase 2022 to 2020 with objectives focused on: “Reforming institution; building, improving the quality of cadres, civil servants, public servants, focus of interest on reform of salary policy in order to motivate cadres, civil servants, public servants to do their tasks with high quality and effectiveness; improving the quality of public administration service and public service”. PAR in the phase 2011 to 2020 has 6 contents, 7 solutions and 16 projects.

Key words: Dynamic economy, flexible and competitive public administration.

INTRODUCTION

REASONS FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM IN VIETNAM

From late 80s decade of the last century, Vietnam carried out innovation of country for political, economical and social areas. At that time, in the public administration area, Vietnam had ideas for reform, and then, from time to time, step by step Vietnam had implemented Public administration Reform (PAR). There are 3 main reasons for PAR in Vietnam:

- Public Administration (PA) system in Vietnam plays important role with important position in the political system. PA system is a dynamic part of State machine which shows the advantages and disadvantages, good things and bad things of the State in all its activities. PA system in Vietnam is a large system with big size of staff and machine system from grass root to the Central.
- The current situation of PA system in Vietnam; the large machine with function overlap, red-tape procedures, low competence of civil servants and low effectiveness of PA system
- In the real situation of the PA activities, there are many “not good enough things” that cause pressing and urgent matters in social life. The people want PA system to be changed better. In the 2001, Vietnam had implemented
the PAR Master Programme for the period 2001 to 2010.

PAR MASTER PROGRAMME FOR THE PERIOD (2001 - 2010)

The overall goal of PAR Master Programme was “be successfully building a democratic, strong, clean, professionalized, modernized, effective and efficient public administration system which operates in line with the principles of the socialist ruled-by-law State under the leadership of the Party; the contingent of cadres), civil servants will have appropriate capacities and ethical qualities that is able to respond to the requirements of the national building and development (table 1). Up to 2010, the public administration system will be fundamentally reformed to satisfy the requirements of managing a socialist oriented - market economy”

The PAR MP defines 9 concrete objectives, 4 content areas of PAR, 7 plans of action and 5 solutions. There are 9 objectives:

- Improving administrative institutional system, regime and policy;
- Erasing and cutting行政 procedures with red tape, complicatedness;
- Identifying clearly function, task and responsibility for organizations in PA system;
- Structure of the Government will be orderly appropriated;
- Up to 2005, identification of decentralization for PA.
- Up to 2010, civil servants will be professionals and modernized with rational structure and size;
- Up to 2005, civil servants’ salary will be reformed;
- Up to 2005, financial mechanism will be reformed in the line with PA organizations and public service;
- Civil service will be modernized.

There are 4 contents of PAR:

- Institutional reform.
- Reform on organizational structure of the public administration.
- Development and quality improvement of the contingent of cadres, civil servants.
- Public finance reform.

There are 7 plans:

- National Plan of Action No. 1: The Action Plan to renovate the development, issuance, and quality improvement of legal normative documents.
- National Plan of Action No. 2: The Action Plan to study and define on roles, functions, organizational structure of agencies in the state administrative system.
- National Plan of Action No. 4: The Action Plan to improve the quality of the contingent of public officials, civil servants.
- National Plan of Action No. 6: The Action Plan on renovation of financial management mechanism for administrative and public service delivery agencies.
- National Plan of Action No. 7: The Action Plan on modernization of the administrative system

There are 5 solutions:

- Improving leadership in PA system.
- Implementation of PAR in the line with innovation of political system.
- Implementation of PAR with comprehensive from local to Central.
- Supporting, providing financial and human resources.
- Improving communication and information.

RESULTS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF PAR (2001 - 2010)

Institutional reform

As at July, 2010, the Government has submitted over 100 Law drafts to the National Assembly. Every year, the Government issues about 200 Decrees on the average. A number of Laws issued are: Law on Enterprises, Civil Code, Law on Investment, the Competition Law, Law on Bankruptcy, Labor Code, Law on Construction, Land Law, the Customs Law, the Commerce Law and Electricity Law etc. Local Governments at all levels have also strengthened institutional reform, promulgated normative legal documents in conformity with their mandate to implement institutions issued by the central level and to concretize the implementation in line with specific conditions of each locality, reform of administrative procedures and implementation of “One Stop Shop” and Inter-agency OSS.

From 2007 to 2010, the Government had implemented on simplifying administrative procedures (AP) with the first phase being identification of administrative procedures, legal regulations and statistic forms. For the 2nd phase, ministries and localities have completed self-review and reached the target of simplifying at least 30% of AP. The third phase, over 5,500 AP have been checked, 453 AP are requested to be removed, 3749 are proposed to amend and supplement towards creating more favorable conditions for people and enterprises, 288 AP are proposed to replace.

There are some weaknesses and shortcomings of the institutional reform. The quality of the legal document is low. PAR spirit has not yet been embodied consistently and thoroughly in these legal documents.

Legal documents have not been comprehensively issued due to lack of strategic and scientific forecast.
When laws are issued, laws cannot be implemented immediately. The common phenomenon is that laws have to wait for decrees and circulars guiding their implementation. The implementation of institutions are still weak, a number of institutions have not been reviewed, revised and supplemented timely by mechanism of practical checking of the implementing process.

For OSS, inter-agency OSS mechanism, some administrative dossiers have been cut into pieces according to administrative level; the unified process for settling administrative dossiers from central to local level has not been built up and thus, caused inconveniences to organizations and citizens when dealing with AP. The cooperation relationship in solving dossiers between levels and branches has gained positive progress, however, shortcomings and weakness have remained; sense of community responsibility between parties are still low, the situation of transferring works and responsibility to each other is also available.

Reform on organizational structure of the public administration

The first task is to adjust, define functions, tasks each agency in the administrative system and to overcome overlap and duplication of functions; tasks has been successfully realized. One of the important results in defining clearly the functions, tasks of State administrative agencies is initially distinguishing the operations between state administrative agency and non-business and public service delivery agency.

The second task is management decentralization between Central and Local and between levels of local government. The implementing decentralization has contributed to positive movement in terms of executing tasks, power of ministries, central branches towards decreasing at maximum specific operations by decentralizing to local governments, non-business agencies and enterprises.

The third is to set organizing structure of government, organize cross-sector and multi-disciplinary ministries and adjust organizing structure inside of ministries, ministerial-level agencies and government’s attached agencies.

There are some weaknesses and shortcomings of the organization reform. The number of ministries is going down, while number of department level in ministries goes up. The management decentralization of non-business agencies has been recognized, however, the deployment remained slow; mechanism for task assigning, ordering, business registration has not been guided timely which have caused the slow process of renovation of management mechanism in terms of public service towards the socialization.

Improving quality of the contingent of cadres, civil servants

There are 3 activities for improvement of civil servants
quality: renovation in management of cadres and civil servants, reforming the salary system and developing incentive policies and reform of training.

Decentralization has been implemented in management of the civil servants. Responsibilities and mandate to manage the contingent of public servants, civil servants of the Prime Minister, ministries, branches and local Governments have been clearly defined.

There have been initial improvements in salary and social insurance policies, which contribute to stability of lives of civil servants. The salary reform project has adjusted the roadmap and steps in salary reform as compared to the original goal of fundamentally reforming salary regimes for civil servants.

In reform of training civil servants, training contents and curriculum have been initially renovated in line with objects to be trained; task division among training institutions for civil servants has also been promulgated. Results of implementation plans of training civil servants for 2001 to 2010 shows that, 4,884,506 civil servants have been trained in the past ten years; of which 883,718 has been trained in political theory; 1,230,536 in knowledge of state management; 2,122,702 in specialized knowledge; 97,858 in foreign languages and 224,254 in informatics.

For 2006 to 2008 periods, 42,800 rounds of administrative public servants, managers, 27,180 leading specialists, experts and source cadres have been sent for abroad training. The number of cadres, civil servants and public servants sent abroad for training increased 4.2 times against that in 2001 to 2003.

There are some weaknesses and shortcomings of the reform of civil servants management and quality of cadres, civil servants. The quality of the contingent of civil servants has not yet met requirements of state management in the new mechanism. The quality, especially the state management knowledge and respective administrative skills of the civil servants is still low. The number of degrees and certificates increased, but professional quality of cadres and civil servants owned degrees and certificates did not.

The planning in training civil servants is not high and non-professional. Training programme has overlapped and focused mainly on theory and lack of practices. Many contents related to re-arranging, strengthening and expanding system of training facilities for civil servants have not implemented.

There is no small number of cadres, and civil servants who commit corruption are authoritarian. They lack a sense of responsibility and service-oriented spirit. They are indifferent to the requirements of the people and the society.

In public media, the Director of the PAR department said to a reporter of Newspaper: “According to some evaluation of leaders in PA agencies, there is about 30% civil servants working well, another 30% working with limited results and the left has no results”. Recently, a member of National Assembly said in the famous E-Newspaper: For the success of the salary policy reform, it is necessary to cut off about 40% civil servants.

Public finance reform

The implementation of self-control and self-responsibility is a mechanism of State administrative agencies. The regime of autonomy and self-responsibility has contributed to pushing agencies to re-arrange apparatus, staff down-sizing, improving working effectiveness, well fulfilling assigned tasks, saving budget, strengthening material facilities, and gradually modernizing management technology, increasing income for cadres and civil servants.

Over 80% central agencies have developed internal expenditure regulations, and regulations on public asset management, of which the allocation of additional income for cadres and civil servants must be gone together with work’s performance based on the evaluation and ranking; concurrently, the transparency and accountability should be carried out in agencies.

Modernization of public administration

Reforms of working style and mode in Local Authorities have issues working in regulations of ministries, and people committees of different levels. These working regulations have clearly assigned power, responsibility of collective and working relationship aimed at fulfilling the tasks of ministries and people committees of all levels. Working principles and coordination in administrative machinery have been defined more clearly.

PA Modernization is dealing with administrative discipline and rules, computerization of administrative management and modernization of public facilities and offices.

GENERAL EVALUATION ON PAR IMPLEMENTATION

Some results of PAR implementation

In the past 10 years, PAR has changed the public administration and has been considered as an important measure to realize the socio-economic strategy (2001 to 2010). PAR results have promoted economic reforms, democratization of social lives, international economic integration, consolidation and maintenance of political stability. It can be affirmed that PAR has obtained major achievements.

The first institutions of the public administration have been basically reformed and perfected in accordance with the process of democratization, the establishment of public, transparent regimes and market economy.
Administrative procedure reform has improved the relationship between the State and the people and has improved democracy in the relationship among state administrative agencies; attracted the attention of the people to the jobs of the State and the operation of the public administration.

The second administrative apparatus has been much better than that of ten years ago, reduced the overlap and duplication in terms of functions and tasks; internal structure has clearly been defined more between state management agencies and public service delivery units.

The organizational structure of administrative agencies from central to local levels has been gradually redeveloped towards rationalization and reduction of focal points. The effectiveness and efficiency of state management of administrative system has improved such as unity, transparency, accountability, and the people’s democracy have been initially mobilized etc.

The third and roles, functions, tasks of state administrative agencies have been adjusted to ensure state management and service for the society. Through results and impacts of reforms, adjustment in decentralization, concepts and awareness of roles, macro-management functions of the Government have been improved and made more appropriate.

The fourth administrative procedures, specifically procedures handling works between state administrative agencies and the people and enterprises have been improved substantially. Administrative procedures have been simplified towards publicity and transparency creating favorable conditions for people and enterprises. Through a series of reforms and measures such as reforms of administrative procedures, “one-stop-shop” mechanism, acceleration of civil service examination and inspection etc., a motto of the public administration in serving the people, enterprises has been adopted, providing an impetus for intensive changes in the whole civil service system.

The fifth building contingent of cadres and civil services has gained new progress, reviewing, adjusting and synchronously issuing system of standard, titles of civil servants. The mode of recruitment and examination for upgrading grades of cadres and civil servants has been renovated.

The sixth reform of public finance has gained initial results and management of finance and budget has changed sharply. The expenditure supervision by using internal expenditure regulations has reached positive impacts.

Some weaknesses and shortcomings of PAR implementation

In the past 10 years, PAR has been slow in progress and inconsistent. PAR effects have not met the target of successfully building a democratic, strong, clean, professionalized and modernized administration by 2010. In general, achievements obtained in the past 10 years are very limited not symmetric with requirements on comprehensive renovation and general objective proposed by PAR MP. Results and progress reaches are not sustainable.

Institutional system is incomprehensive and lacks unity. The number of laws in Vietnam institutional system needed to transfer to market economy has not been defined clearly. Many laws are issued with low quality.

Apparatus inside of ministries and branches has been enlarged. Lack of apparatus stability of local administrative body and administrative units at different levels have not been planned comprehensively; over the past 10 years, the number of provinces increased from 53 to 63 due to separation. The monitoring and supervision after decentralization has been loosen.

The criteria for building structure of cadres and civil servants is not developed in administrative agencies, the training cadres before appointing has not been properly done, the regime for responsibility of head has not been stipulated and the quality of contingent of cadres and civil servants after training has not been evaluated. The process of salary reform has been deployed very slowly.

Why PAR in Vietnam was not successful as well as desired

There are several reasons why PAR has been slow as regards implementation. Firstly, PAR is a difficult work and has many resistances. Despite the fact that PAR is considered as top priority, however, the organizing implementation from central to local level has not been properly carried out. At central level, the establishment of Steering Committee has proven inappropriate which slowly has been reviewed and fixed. Reasonable attention has not been paid to the information and communication served for PAR, which has not created high unity and awareness in the whole political system as well as, people’s agreement.

Secondly, PAR has relationship with judiciary and legislative reform and specifically, the nature of our political system still lack essential solution in direction and guidance ensuring the effective link.

Thirdly, PAR programme plans designed is too general, lack details and its objectives are too qualitative and it is difficult to evaluate the right effectiveness. It is more difficult to define the clearly responsibility of collective and individual related to an area of work which is considered as focal and targeted.

Many important and core issues have not been clearly defined as well as, reached a consensus on guideline, and awareness (Organizational apparatus of Government in accordance with model of cross-sector and multi-area management ministries; decentralization and power assignment, etc)
Many tasks offered but not attached with essential secured measures, therefore, most of them are unfinished, no one has taken responsibility. In most areas, the abuse of piloting model is widespread; lack of review, evaluation and lesson learnt timely when the pilot is undertaken, hence, the impact is still low.

Fourthly, resources and essential conditions have not been fully provided, including human resource and finance. Moreover, there were some bad things such as authoritarianism, red-tape and corruption in civil service (they are still plaguing). The openness and transparency of the administration retain shortcomings. Deterioration of ideology and lifestyle and violation of civil service ethics of cadres and civil servants has caused indignation among the people.

Finally, there were some shortcomings and disadvantages that belonged to the cadres and civil servants. The professional and administrative skills of cadres and civil servants are low. The qualification and skills of cadres and civil servants are low and have not met the requirements of a modernized administration.

**Some lessons learnt from implementation of PAR in Vietnam**

Some lessons can be drawn from PAR implementation over the past 10 years with both successes and shortcomings:

1. It is necessary to improve the awareness of all authority levels and branches on PAR such as objectives, and significance of PAR with respect to the construction and development of the country. The priority should be given to propaganda in terms of state guidelines, orientations and policies on PAR among levels of authority and the entire people.

   Steering of the Government and local Government at all levels is decisive in the success of PAR. PAR is a regular and continuing task of organizations and agencies. It must be synchronized with gradual renovation of political system, economic reform and judicial and legislative reform.

2. PAR programme and plans should clearly define objectives, tasks and implementation measures. It should be easier to understand to everyone, civil servants and the people.

PAR implementation, examination, evaluation and review should be linked with objectives as well as impacts on the society. In the PAR Master Programme, national plan of action set too many objectives that are both beyond their capacity and far from realistic. Due attention has not been paid to the implementation of national plan of action because it is not linked with the performance of main tasks of ministries and branches.

There is confusion in the organization mechanism of national plan of action and in task division and coordination among relevant ministries, which is time-consuming and has affected the implementation progress.

It is very important to pilot PAR initiatives. The transformation into a socialist-oriented market economy and service-oriented public administration may come up with many initiatives that cannot be immediately concluded. Evaluation and review through pilot will help identify problems to be further addressed or replicate successful initiatives. Innovative mechanisms such as “One-stop-shop”, block staffing and block grants, etc., have been established by piloting mode.

A condition that ensured the success of PAR is political determination and responsibility of head of organizations. In practice, government documents have clearly promulgated this spirit, but there is lack of concretized measures to implement. So far, it is difficult to find any case that head of ministries, branches and localities have been criticized and handled due to failing the deployment of PAR task.

**PAR MASTER PROGRAMME FOR THE PERIOD (2011 - 2020)**

The Government Resolution No: 30c/ND-CP was dated 08 November, 2011, of the Vietnam Government on PAR MP 2011 to 2020 and its objectives are:

- Development of the free-market economical system with socialism oriented.
- Development of equal and transparency business environment.
- Development of the state administrative system with transparency, modernization, effectiveness and efficiency.
- Ensure democracy for the people; it is the right of the people.
- Development of civil and public servants with good competence to meet with the requirement to serve people and development of the country.

In the next 10 years, PAR will be focused on:

1. Institutional reform.
2. Quality of cadres, civil and public servants.
3. Quality of public service and administrative service.

The tasks of PAR 2011 to 2020:

- Institutional reform.
- Reform of administrative procedures.
- Reform of administrative machine.
- Development of quality of civil servants, public servants.
- Public finance reform.
- Modernization public administration system.
The solutions for PAR implementation are:

- Strengthening leadership of PAR from the top to grassroots.
- Training cadres, civil and public servants with high effectiveness; reinforcing transparency and accountability in civil service.
- Improving competency of civil servants who work for PAR at all levels of public administration system.
- Carry out evaluation of PAR implementation frequency.
- Developing application of IT - communication in the line with PAR.
- Ensuring public budget for PAR program.
- Reforming of salary policy in order to motivate cadres, civil and public servants to do their tasks with high quality and effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

Over 10 years 2001 to 2010, Vietnam had implemented the PAR Master Programme with big efforts of Government and each civil servant. There were many successes of PAR in institution reform, Government machine reform, improving civil servants’ quality and public financial reform. However, there were some weaknesses and shortcomings of the PAR. Those weaknesses had caused unsatisfaction of people with PAR such that PAR implementation was not successful as desired from the Government.

For the next 10 years, with the new PAR Master Programme and lesson-learned from last PAR implementation, Vietnamese Government will make sure that the PAR implementation will be successful and Vietnamese Government and People will be happy with PAR in institution reform, reform of administrative procedures, reform of administrative machine, development of quality of civil servants, public servants, public finance reform and modernization public administration system.

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