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STRENGTHENING DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTIONS AND PUBLIC SERVICE IMPLEMENTATION CAPACITY IN CONTEMPORARY VIETNAM: KEY THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract: *This study examines the strengthening of development institutions and public service implementation capacity as Vietnam enters a new phase of national development. Against the backdrop of a gradual shift from traditional administrative management toward developmental governance, this research focuses on addressing institutional bottlenecks and enhancing the effectiveness of policy implementation. Methodologically, it adopts a qualitative approach, employing secondary document analysis, theoretical synthesis, and systematic comparison. The findings demonstrate that institutional quality and implementation capacity constitute mutually reinforcing dimensions of effective public governance. Specifically, the study identifies three major clusters of implementation bottlenecks: inconsistencies and overlaps within the legal and regulatory framework, capacity limitations at the local level, and delays alongside fragmentation in information flows. On this basis, the article proposes three strategic policy directions: strengthening the coherence and predictability of the institutional framework; deepening decentralization by aligning authority with resources and accountability; and advancing a results-oriented model of developmental governance. Ultimately, these findings advance the understanding of public governance in Vietnam, offering actionable policy implications to strengthen state capacity, improve public service delivery, and foster sustainable national development.*

Keywords: *Development institutions; Public service implementation capacity; Decentralization; Developmental governance; Institutional reform; Public governance.*

1. INTRODUCTION

As Vietnam navigates a new phase of development, there is a pressing imperative to transition from a traditional administrative mindset toward a developmental governance approach. In this paradigm, institutional strengthening and public service implementation capacity are inextricably linked, jointly determining the quality of national governance. This transformation extends beyond mere administrative restructuring; fundamentally, it represents a profound philosophical shift in contemporary governance, demanding a human-centric system that drives holistic national advancement (Uoc, Ai, & Binh, 2023). Aligned with this vision, the 2026–2030 development agenda prioritizes institutional reform, innovation, and digital transformation as key catalysts for unlocking resources and cultivating new growth engines.

However, institutional efficacy relies not only on the caliber of legal and regulatory frameworks but, crucially, on the state's capacity to translate these provisions into tangible action. The persistent gap between policy design and implementation frequently stems from overlapping regulations, fragile coordination mechanisms, decentralization unmatched by adequate resources, and capability shortfalls within the civil service. Consequently, the core challenge transcends the mere "strengthening of institutions." It necessitates a comprehensive overhaul of policy enforcement mechanisms - shifting the regulatory focus from *ex ante* control to *ex post* supervision, and coupling decentralization with rigorous monitoring, oversight, and robust accountability.

Within this process, public service implementation capacity emerges as a central determinant of effective state governance. These two dimensions—institutions and implementation - form an integrated, dialectical whole. While progressive policies depend on capable implementation to materialize their intent, robust implementation equally requires a transparent and predictable legal framework to prevent arbitrary decision-making. Ultimately, institutions establish the boundaries of

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action, while implementation capacity dictates the actualization of tangible outcomes in practice.

Motivated by these theoretical and practical imperatives, this article examines the dialectical relationship between advancing development institutions and elevating public service implementation capacity. The study is structured around three core objectives: *(1)* elucidating the theoretical foundations and mutual dependencies of institutions and implementation capacity; *(2)* identifying the primary structural and operational bottlenecks hindering policy execution; and *(3)* formulating strategic policy implications to fortify implementation capacity, optimize national governance, and propel sustainable development in the new era.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design, integrating policy and institutional analyses to examine the theoretical and practical dimensions of strengthening development institutions and public service implementation capacity in contemporary Vietnam. The analysis relies predominantly on secondary data triangulated from three primary sources: (i) statutory laws, Party resolutions, government decrees, and pertinent policy directives; (ii) peer-reviewed academic literature, international frameworks, and policy reports (notably from the OECD); and (iii) official government reports documenting empirical practices in public administration.

The methodological procedure unfolds in three systematic phases. First, a comprehensive review and synthesis of relevant literature and policy documents are conducted to construct the theoretical foundation and analytical framework. Second, qualitative content analysis and systematic coding are applied to identify institutional bottlenecks, capability constraints, and the synergistic interplay between regulatory frameworks and execution capacity. Third, the extracted data are cross-referenced, synthesized, and conceptually generalized to distill core issues and formulate actionable policy implications. To ensure methodological transparency and analytical rigor, this study relies heavily on logical reasoning, inductive inference, alongside comparative and structural analyses.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study is guided by the following central research questions:

RQ1: What are the fundamental theoretical and practical challenges hindering the optimization of development institutions in contemporary Vietnam?

RQ2: How can public service implementation capacity be strategically enhanced to ensure that institutional frameworks are effectively translated into tangible developmental outcomes?

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Development Institutions and Public Service Implementation Capacity: Interrelationships and Key Bottlenecks

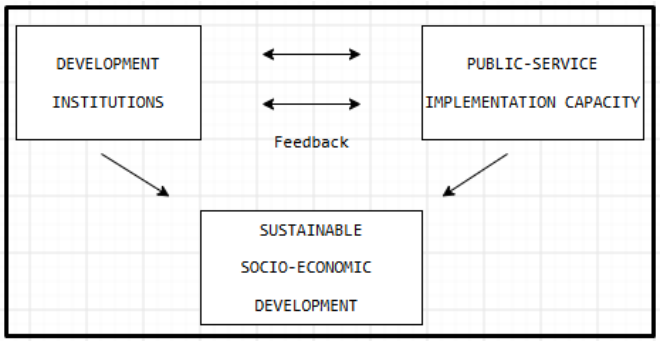
From a theoretical standpoint, the findings reveal that development institutions and public service implementation capacity form a dialectically interrelated and mutually reinforcing continuum, underpinning governance effectiveness throughout the entire policy cycle. Institutions - encompassing rules, legal norms, and organizational frameworks - establish the boundaries of action, dictate resource allocation, and ensure administrative coherence. However, the substantive value of these institutions is only actualized through robust implementation capacity: the ability to operationalize policies, optimally deploy resources, proactively adapt to contextual shifts, and uphold accountability. Conversely, execution capacity can only achieve its full potential within a transparent, stable, and predictable institutional ecosystem. Consequently, the caliber of national governance cannot be evaluated by looking at institutional design or administrative prowess in isolation. It must be assessed through the dynamic interplay of policy design, execution, feedback loops, and iterative institutional refinement. Implementation serves as the empirical litmus test for institutional efficacy, generating critical evidence to identify bottlenecks and guide subsequent reforms. When perfectly aligned, these two dimensions act as synergistic drivers of development. Conversely, persistent disconnects breed inflated governance costs, compromise policy outcomes, and precipitate the misallocation of public resources.

Empirically, this study identifies three primary clusters of bottlenecks that impede the translation of institutional blueprints into tangible development outcomes in contemporary Vietnam. First, the overarching legal and policy framework remains plagued by overlaps, inconsistencies, and chronic delays in adapting to evolving practical realities. These deficiencies inevitably spawn regulatory loopholes, convolute the delegation of authority, and inflate compliance costs. Second, implementation capacity remains highly uneven, particularly at the grassroots level. Pervasive challenges include a rigidly compliance-driven administrative mindset, a deficient capacity for proactive adaptation, fragmented inter-agency coordination, and a civil service workforce whose competencies lag behind the demands of modern public governance. Third, mechanisms governing information exchange, regulatory oversight, and policy feedback lack sufficient integration. This fragmentation exacerbates the disconnect between macro-level strategic formulation and local-level execution outcomes.

These findings underscore that institutional strengthening is inextricably bound to the cultivation of implementation capacity. Therefore, reform agendas must

pivot from a narrow fixation on "amending legal texts" toward a holistic governance paradigm—one that seamlessly integrates institutional quality, execution capability, cohesive coordination mechanisms, and transparent accountability. This integration is an indispensable prerequisite for optimizing the efficiency of national governance and solidifying public trust in the state's developmental trajectory for the new era.

Figure: Institutional Capacity - Implementation Framework



Source: Author's own elaboration using diagrams.net (draw.io).

4.2. Key Policy Implications

Synthesizing the theoretical and empirical findings, this study proposes two strategic policy directions designed to fortify development institutions, elevate public service execution capacity, and ultimately optimize national governance in contemporary Vietnam.

First, the fortification of development institutions necessitates a cohesive, transparent, and highly accountable regulatory framework, underpinned by well-defined decentralization and robust mechanisms for power control. This evolution must transcend the piecemeal amendment of isolated legal texts, pivoting instead toward the cultivation of an interconnected institutional ecosystem that is stable, actionable, and inherently adaptive to dynamic socioeconomic shifts. Furthermore, decentralization and the delegation of authority must be predicated on a precise delineation of functions and responsibilities, ensuring that the devolution of power is strictly matched with commensurate resources and rigorous oversight mechanisms. Concurrently, the strategic integration of digital data infrastructure is imperative for monitoring policy execution, evaluating institutional performance, and ensuring systemic transparency. This comprehensive approach will effectively mitigate chronic issues of responsibility-shifting and administrative avoidance, thereby institutionalizing accountability across the entire public administration apparatus.

Second, public service implementation capacity must be comprehensively elevated in tandem with a transition toward a citizen- and business-centric developmental governance model. Progressive institutions only yield tangible developmental value when actualized through the competencies of public officials and modern governance practices. Consequently, reform trajectories must decisively pivot from procedural compliance to results-based governance. This requires standardizing performance metrics that evaluate civil service capability against the quality, timeliness, and efficacy of policy execution. Simultaneously, fortifying the professional expertise, digital fluency, adaptive capacity, and innovative mindset of public officials -particularly at the grassroots level - emerges as a strategic imperative. Crucially, this capacity-building agenda must transcend technical administrative competencies to embed robust public-service ethics and a citizen-centered political culture. Cultivating these values is foundational to forging an integrity-driven, responsive, and accountable civil service (Mai Uoc, 2023).

Furthermore, policy formulation must be increasingly anchored in scientific evidence, data analytics, and multidimensional empirical feedback. In this context, digital transformation must be repositioned not merely as a technological upgrade, but as the strategic infrastructure of national governance. By facilitating data interoperability, real-time information exchange, and systemic transparency, this digital infrastructure significantly enhances the responsiveness and caliber of public-service delivery. Digital platforms effectively dismantle geographical and administrative barriers, empowering local authorities to engage in direct, continuous interactions with the public. This paradigm shift transcends being a mere compensatory mechanism for streamlined administrative layers; rather, it pioneers innovative public governance models where bidirectional information flows drive timely, evidence-informed decision-making (Zheng & Zheng, 2014).

More profoundly, this digitalization compels public authorities to abandon unilateral, top-down communication paradigms in favor of multi-directional dialogue, active civic engagement, and the substantive co-creation of public value (Zavattaro & Sementelli, 2014). Aligning with the OECD Digital Government Policy Framework, digital transformation in public administration cannot be relegated to the mere "computerization" of legacy procedures. Instead, it demands a comprehensive redesign of governance architectures wherein data functions as a strategic resource to amplify transparency, accountability, and value generation (OECD, 2020). Ultimately, Vietnam's digital transformation must be seamlessly integrated with institutional reform and capacity-building initiatives. This synergy will cultivate a responsive, transparent, and results-oriented public administration uniquely equipped to propel sustainable national development.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has elucidated the dialectical relationship between fortifying development institutions and enhancing public service implementation capacity, systematically

identifying the core structural and operational bottlenecks impeding public governance in contemporary Vietnam. From a theoretical standpoint, the research constructs an integrated analytical framework that bridges institutional design, decentralization, and execution capability. In doing so, it advances the conceptual understanding of how regulatory architectures are actualized into tangible governance outcomes. From a practical perspective, the proposed policy implications advocate for a decisive paradigm shift from traditional administrative management toward developmental governance. This transition places a heightened premium on execution efficacy, public-service outcomes, robust accountability, and citizen-centric governance.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the literature by contextualizing contemporary public governance theories within the unique institutional realities of Vietnam. Nevertheless, the findings must be interpreted in light of certain methodological limitations. Given its reliance on qualitative methods and secondary data, the analysis lacks extensive quantitative evidence regarding spatial variations in implementation capacity or governance outcomes across different localities. Future scholarship should address these gaps by adopting mixed-method approaches, conducting large-scale empirical surveys of public officials, citizens, and other key stakeholders, and utilizing comparative or longitudinal research designs. Such inquiries would yield more robust empirical evidence on how implementation capacity ultimately dictates governance effectiveness and socioeconomic development across diverse regions and administrative tiers in Vietnam.

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