

CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING THE CAPACITY OF THE COMMUNE -LEVEL POLITICAL SYSTEM IN VIETNAM

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Abstract: The research focuses on clarifying some concepts about the capacity, the capacity of the political system, the ability of the commune-level political system, and assessing the political system capacity in Vietnam, thereby clearly seeing the practical and potential ability of the system to fulfill its functions and duties as a perfect whole of components, such as the Communist Party, government, Fatherland Front, and socio-political organizations. The study has analyzed the basis for building a system of evaluation criteria, defining the functions and tasks of the parts constituting the political system, and then proposing a system of evaluation criteria for the capacity of the political system at the commune level to consider the accomplishment level of the system and its member organizations.

Keywords: Capacity, criteria to assess capacity, the political system at the commune level.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the most common sense, a grassroots political system's capacity is the one at the commune, ward, and equivalent levels, of the socio-political organizations that constitute the system, ensuring its function and task effectively with high quality. However, to evaluate the political system's capacity, it is required to have specific criteria systems through which can accurately assess, measure the ability of the whole grassroots political system in Vietnam.

1. Basic concepts:

- *Capacity*: many people agreed with the concept "capacity is a combination of thinking, skills, and attitudes in the available or potential form that can be learned by an individual or organization for successful implementation mission." [1]. The concept of capacity is commonly understood as abilities, skills, competence. Capacity is often understood as a combination of knowledge, attitudes, skills, behaviors, motives, or other personal characteristics that play an important role in accomplishing work. Capacity also contains the willingness to act, motivation, and social responsibility to behave successfully with changing situations. It means that individuals have to master the systems of knowledge, skills, and attitudes and apply them reasonably to the successful implementation of tasks, effectively solving the posing problems in their lives. So, capacity can be understood as the actual and inherent latent ability of individuals, groups, organizations, and systems to ensure their functions, tasks or fulfill their operational requirements effectively with productivity, quality, and sustainability.

- *Political system*: To understand a concept of what the political system is, first of all, we need to understand what is the concept of "politics"? And what is a "system"? A definition from Merriam - Webster's dictionary shows that Politics is "activities that influence actions and policies of a government or getting and keeping power in a government; the work or job of people (such as elected officials) who are part of a government." [2]. Researcher Pham Thai Viet said: "The system is not a set of separate units, but a unified body of interdependent elements." [3]. The political system "is a system involving government and its politics which includes the members who are in power within country [4]. Political system "is a part of the social superstructure, including organizations, institutions relating to each other in terms of purpose, function in implementing or participating in the exercise of political power, in making political decisions." [5] Thus, the

political system is directly related to a government's activities. Members of the government have a close relationship with each other, forming a perfect whole to implement its functions and tasks.

- *The Vietnamese political system* is a united perfect whole in which institutions, rules, political and socio-political organizations of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam have a close relationship, sticking together. It includes three components: the Communist Party of Vietnam, the State, the Vietnam Fatherland Front with its socio-political organizations operating according to their functions and tasks to consolidate and maintain the socialist regime following the interests of the working class and the whole Vietnamese nation. Each component of the Vietnamese political system plays a specific role: The Communist Party of Vietnam plays a leading role in the State and society. The State of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam plays a role in social management. The Vietnam Fatherland Front and socio-political organizations coordinate with the State for social management, national unity, representing the people's interests, tightening the relationship between the People and the Party and the State.

- *The commune-level political system in Vietnam*: The commune-level political system in Vietnam refers to the current political system in a rural area. The commune-level political system also includes components: the Communist Party, the State, the fatherland Front, and the political and social organizations in the commune. Each component exists with its roles and functions and is closely related to each other, forming a system, managing all social life activities in the commune. The commune-level political system is the lowest level, which is the foundation of the democratic regime of Vietnam's entire political system. It is where all people's activities occur; the local government, the Party units are closest to the people and implement the Party's guidelines and policies. The commune-level political system has both the common characteristics of the country's political system and the commune-level specificity. In the commune-level political system, "the Party unite acts as a comprehensive leader in all commune aspects, leading the local administration and mass organizations. The commune-level government is a local authority, consisting of the commune-level People's Council (the highest state authority in the locality), elected by the local people. The commune-level People's Committee, elected by the commune-level People's Council, is responsible for implementing comprehensive state management in the commune and the commune-level People's Council's resolutions. Commune-level socio-political organizations in Vietnam include the Fatherland Front, Youth Union, Women's Union, Farmer's Union and Veterans' Association acting as protectors and representatives of interest and will of the people"[6].

- *The capacity of the commune-level political system in Vietnam*: In the common view, it is the ability to fulfill tasks effectively with productivity and quality. The capacity of the commune-level political system "is the capacity of the perfect united whole, inextricably linking all the commune-level political system, including Communist Party units, administration, Fatherland Front and mass and political - social organizations."[7]. It is the practical, inherent, latent ability of the entire system to implement the functions and tasks and ensure each component's task accomplishment effectively.

- *Assessing the capacity of the commune-level political system*: It is a consideration and description about knowledge, skills, attitudes, and social responsibilities with inherent qualities of the whole system and each component of the commune-level political system; assessing the application of knowledge, skills, attitudes or inherent qualities for the implementation of system tasks and of specific components matching the suitable criteria. In order to formulate criteria and indicators for assessing the capacity of the commune-level political system, it is not only based on the description of inherent characteristics of the commune-level political system but also based on the description of the functions and tasks that the commune-level political system must accomplish. The degree of the functions and tasks' accomplishment of the commune-level political system is not only determined by the quality, inherent ability of the political system, the relationship between the fundamental factors, but also by the influence and the impact of the whole system, and environmental factors outside the political system. Thus, considering the level of accomplishment or failure to fulfill the system's functions and duties and each component is an essential basis for assessing the commune-level political system's capacity.

2. The basis for building criteria to assess the capacity of the commune-level political system in Vietnam.

- *Derived from the position and role of the commune – level political system*

President Ho Chi Minh affirmed: "The foundation of all work is at the commune –level."[8]. He also said: "The commune-level is the closest one to the people, and is the foundation of administration. At the commune -level, if the

officials work well, all jobs are done. However, because of the small-minded character, Pooh-Bah's style of work, assignment failure of leaders, people's bad selection for the excellent candidate, failure in prompting, helping, coaching, and in inspecting from high ranking officials, the majority of the commune-level officials work sluggishly with low competence and spirit"[9]. Therefore, it is necessary to propose the criteria to assess the commune-level political system's capacity, thereby pointing out the direction and solutions to overcome the political system's weaknesses, especially in the current period.

The commune is the grass-root level in rural areas where the surface is enormous and accounting for most of the total Vietnamese grass-root units. The commune is the lowest level in the government administration, but it is the foundation of the political regime and social life. The commune is where the people's daily lives take place, the last necessary address that all decisions, guidelines, policies, and laws of the Party and the State must come. The people's real-life mood, attitude, beliefs, and actions are the clearest norm to assess the Party and State's guidelines and policies' effectiveness. The commune is not a level of making policies, but rather a level of action, bringing the policy and resolutions to people's lives. Commune-level officials need to have the capacity to carry out, organize work, and regularly educate, propagate, and mobilize the masses, always keep a close distance to the people and understand the people. Therefore, although the commune is the lowest level in the political system, it is essential in maintaining the existence of the regime.

- Derived from the system structure of the commune-level political system

The system structure of the commune-level political system in Vietnam today is reflected in the close relationship, the mutual impact between their components. These components are unified, coexistent, and operating in the same residential area. The commune-level political system components carry out their activities within the State's law scope and aim the common objectives of socio-economic development in the commune, taking care of the local people's material and spiritual life. Society's common goal is to implement "rich people, strong countries, democratic - fair and civilized societies."

In the unity of the political system, the commune Party is a core part, taking the leading role of the political system, leading the government through guidelines, policies, and cadre work, and being a bridge between people and commune-level government. The commune-level government is the main force, playing the role of managing, administering, and organizing all aspects of local life, promoting all potential talents and material resources to serve the socio-economic development. The Fatherland Front and the local mass organizations are the bridge between the people and the Party organization and the government at the commune level, representing the interests and mastery of all strata's people, being the support force for Party and commune-level government.

- Derived from the functions and duties of the commune -level political system

As mentioned above, the commune-level political system in Vietnam consists of three components: the Communist Party, the State, and the mass organizations. Each component exists with its functions and having close relationships with each other, forming a unified system. Commune-level administration is the central part, directly organizing the Party's guidelines and policies and the State's laws with the simplest apparatus, varying staff, knowledge shortage, and are greatly influenced by the lineage relations and village culture. Commune-level governments are the place to receive and handle the people's urgent requests. If the commune-level administration does not promptly address the requirements, the people's legitimate aspirations, their confidence in the Party, and grass-root authorities will be declined.

The effective implementation of the commune-level political system's functions and tasks is determined by the political system's inherent qualities and abilities, characteristic of the relationship between the inside and outside elements. Therefore, the level of accomplishing the system's functions and tasks and each component is the basis for assessing the commune-level political system's capacity and is the key to building a criteria system to evaluate the commune political system's ability in Vietnam today.

3. Criteria to assess the capacity of the commune-level political system in Vietnam

Based on the functions and tasks of the commune-level political system, and the results of the analyses and studies of the authors, and the foundation of the criteria set out in the previous section, we propose 06 criteria groups to assess the capacity of the commune -level political system in Vietnam today, specifically as follows:

- Group 1. Criteria for evaluating general competencies of the commune-level political system as a perfect whole.

There are some following contents:

- + The capacity to organize and mobilize people to implement the Party's policies and laws of the State
- + The capacity to create a great unity mass of whole people
- + The ability to build and enforce democratization of social life
- + The capacity of socio-economic development and improvement of people's life.
- + The capacity to maintain socio-political stability, fighting against the sabotage of hostile forces.

- *Group 2. Criteria for evaluating the ability of Party organizations/ Party cells.*

There are some following contents:

- + Nuclear role in the leadership of economic development and local organization and personnel work.
- + The ability in Party construction, administration, Fatherland Front, socio-political building, ensuring the close coordination between organizations in the political system aimed at serving the people;
- + Check and supervise the implementation of the Party's resolutions
- + Keep close contact with the people, and reflect, answer all people's aspirations.

- *Group 3. Criteria for evaluating the capacity of commune-level People's Councils*

There are some following contents:

- + Approving the annual socio-economic development plan of the people committee.
- + Approving state budget revenues and expenditures in the locality.
- + Supervising the construction and repair of infrastructure (roads, schools, cultural works).
- + Practicing thrift, fighting wastefulness and corruption, and smuggling.
- + Ensuring education and healthy development in the commune.
- + Developing cultural, artistic, and sport activities (traditional festivals, monuments).
- + Ensuring hygiene, waste treatment, disease prevention, environmental protection.
- + Ensure the implementation of the military service regime.
- + Building militia and self-defense forces.
- + Ensuring security, public order, and social safety.
- + Improve living standards and people's knowledge of ethnic minorities.
- + Implementing religious policies, ensuring the right of freedom of belief and religion of ethnic people.
- + Ensuring the enforcement of laws, documents of superior state agencies, and local resolutions.
- + Ensuring the settlement of complaints and denunciations of citizens.

- *Group 4. Criteria for evaluating the capacity of the commune-level People's Committees.*

There are some following contents:

- + Formulating and organizing the implementation of annual socio-economic development plans.
- + Making estimates of state budget revenues and expenditures and local budgets.
- + Effectively managing and rationally using land and water sources.
- + Mobilizing contributions from organizations and individuals to invest in the construction of infrastructure projects of the commune and public works management (roads, offices, schools, medical stations, electricity works).

- + Guiding the implementation of programs and projects on applying scientific and technological advances to agricultural and forestry production.
- + Organizing the construction and renovation of small irrigation works; guide and organize forest protection and afforestation.
- + Managing the construction and licensing of construction of individual houses; implement the educational development plan in the locality;
- + Organizing the implementation of essential health, population, and family planning programs.
- + Organizing military work, recruiting troops, building, training and using militia and self-defense forces.
- + Implementing measures to ensure security, social order, and safety, preventing and combating crimes and social evils.
- + Managing household registration and travel of foreigners.
- + Addressing small law violations and disputes.

- *Group 5. Criteria for evaluating the capacity of commune-level Fatherland Front*

There are some following contents:

- + Building a great unity mass.
- + Propagandizing and mobilizing people to exercise their mastery.
- + Participating in the election and building government.
- + Supervising the implementation of the Party's and State's undertakings and policies.

- *Group 6. Criteria for evaluating the capacity of socio-political organizations*

There are some following contents:

- + Gathering local members in appropriate socio-political organizations.
- + Applying propaganda, advocacy, education measures to raise political awareness for members.
- + Supporting and improving the living standards of members.
- + Contribute to strengthening the government, maintaining security, social order, and safety in the commune.

The above six criteria groups, when implemented, will be clearly shown through specific indicators to help gather information to assess the capacity of the commune-level political system. To select and supplement particular indicators in each criterion in the above criteria, depending on many factors, first of all depending on the purpose and requirements of each study, each topic, each project; secondly, depending on economic, cultural, social condition, communication, village structure in each locality. Besides, it is necessary to consider the specific features and other tasks that the commune-level political system is directly allocated from the political system at district, provincial/city, and intermediate levels. The method for evaluation and the understanding of the assessor must be considered in the selection and interpretation of specific indicators.

4. Case study of some communes in the Northwest area of Vietnam

Based on the criteria of 6 groups as above and scale as, below*, we selected the survey results of 06 communes to belong to 6 provinces in the Northwest area of Vietnam (Cao Bang, Son La, Lao Cai, Bac Kan, Hoa Binh) to analyze, specifically as follows:

Order number	Province	Cao Bang	Son La	Lao Cai	Dien Bien	Bac Kan	Hoa Binh
	District	Trung Khanh	Moc Chau	Lao Cai city	Muong Nhe	Pac Nam	Tan Lac
	Commune	Dam Thuy	Quy Huong	Lao Cai Ward	Leng Su Sin	Bang Thanh	Do nhan
1	Group 1	3.54	3.52	3.55	3.5	3.5	3.57
2	Group 2	3.53	3.55	3.56	3.55	3.55	3.55
3	Group 3	3.64	3.66	3.63	3.66	3.66	3.62

4	Group 4	3.55	3.57	3.57	3.57	3.57	3.57
5	Group 5	3.8	3.68	3.68	3.68	3.68	3.68
6	Group 6	3.58	3.55	3.61	3.58	3.56	3.57

*Scale:

- Group 1: ① = Very weak; ② = Weak; ③ = medium; ④ = good; ⑤ = very good
- Group 2: ① = Totally disagree; ② = Disagree; ③ = Puzzle; ④ = Agree; ⑤ = Totally agree
- Group 3: ① = Totally disagree; ② = Disagree; ③ = Puzzle; ④ = Agree; ⑤ = Totally agree
- Group 4: ① = Very weak; ② = Weak; ③ = medium; ④ = good; ⑤ = very good
- Group 5: ① = Very weak; ② = Weak; ③ = medium; ④ = good; ⑤ = very good
- Group 6: ① = Very weak; ② = Weak; ③ = medium; ④ = good; ⑤ = very good

The table of average survey results of the criteria shows that people's satisfaction level to the commune level political system (according to 6 criteria groups) only ranges from 3.5 to 3.8 points. The assessment indicates that the political system's capacity in these communes has only reached the above-average level and has not reached a reasonable level. It means that the operational efficiency of the commune-level political system in these communes has certain limitations. Here are the specific analyses:

- *Group 1. Assessing the commune-level political system's general competencies as a perfect whole:* The results show that the evaluation score does not have much fluctuation, mainly at 3.5 to 3.6. The Do Nhan commune (Tan Lac District, Hoa Binh Province) and Lao Cai ward (Lao Cai province) had the highest score. Do Nhan commune is a particular commune with more than 99% of the population being Muong ethnic minority people (gentle and peaceful people). Hence, it is easy to get consensus and implement jobs quickly in the commune. However, due to the difficult terrain, many governmental activities cannot approach people effectively. Lao Cai ward (in Lao Cai city) is convenient for traffic, but it is a border ward and border gate area with many complicated issues. Hence, the evaluation score only stops at 3.55.

- *Group 2. Assessing specific capacities of Party organizations/ Party cells:* The results for evaluation are almost no different. The lowest score is 3.53, and the highest is only 3.56. It shows that the level of assessment is quite similar; there is no significant difference between localities. Besides that, the assessment level is not high in specific criteria. That reflects the Party committee's activities and Party cells in the surveyed localities that are not very good and should have appropriate solutions to improve the quality of operation.

- *Group 3. Assessing the capacity of commune-level People's Councils:* The results are similar to those of Group 2. It also demonstrates that the operational effectiveness of the people's councils is not very good. Therefore, we need to find some better solutions to improve the functional quality of the People's Councils or convert tasks to suit the localities' social and environmental conditions.

- *Group 4. Assessing commune-level People's Committees' capacity:* the results are not much different in the surveyed communes. However, the People's Committee activities' evaluation score is lower than the people's council activities. It is caused by the fact that the People's Committees of the surveyed communes are still slow in dealing with the people's work. In order to solve this problem, it is necessary to improve the quality of officials of the People's Committee and the administrative procedures in the locality.

- *Group 5. Assessing the capacity of commune-level Fatherland Fronts:* The results for evaluating the Fatherland Front's activities are higher than other state organizations. The lowest score is 3.68, and the highest score belongs to Dam Thuy commune, which reached a score of 3.8, approaching the level quite well. It shows that the activities of the Fatherland Front in Dam Thuy commune have been much improved. These are factors that need to be strengthened and further promoted in improving the commune-level political system's operational efficiency.

- *Group 6. Assessing socio-political organizations' capacity:* The results for the evaluation of each socio-political organization are lower than the Fatherland Front. The lowest score is 3.55, and the highest is only 3.61. It shows that the operation of each organization is not yet highly effective and has not been recorded. Therefore, it is necessary to have solutions to improve mass organizations' activities in these communes.

2. CONCLUSION

Improving the political system's capacity, especially at the commune -level, is a good policy of the Communist Party and the Vietnamese State. The political system at the commune level is the place to directly realize the Party's guidelines and the State's policies and laws. It is also the place that directly receives the opinions and aspirations of the people to propose to the Vietnamese Party and State, promulgating the appropriate policies to satisfy the legitimate expectations of the people, contributing to building the close relationship between the Party, the State, and the people, making a growing country.

The effectiveness of fulfilling the political system's functions and tasks is determined mainly by the inherent qualities, abilities of each component's political system and the relationship between them. Therefore, the level of accomplishing the system's functions and tasks and for each element is the basis for building groups of criteria to assess the commune-level political system's capacity.

Based on the functions of the political system recorded in the Party's documents and resolutions as well as the studying results of the authors on the implementation of the functions and tasks of the current political system in Vietnam, we have proposed a set of criteria to assess the capacity of the commune -level political system. The set of criteria includes *Criteria for evaluating general competencies of the commune-level political system as a perfect whole and criteria for assessing specific capacities of each component in the commune- level Political system*, namely: Commune Party committee/cell committee, commune-level administration, and fatherland front and socio-political organizations of Farmers, Women, Veterans, and Youth Union.

Due to differences in natural, geographical, cultural, and economic conditions in the regions of Vietnam, the criteria system's determination for assessing the capacity of the commune-level political system must be based on the specific criteria in each residential area. Thereby, providing solutions to improve the commune-level political system's ability is an essential task in the current period.

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