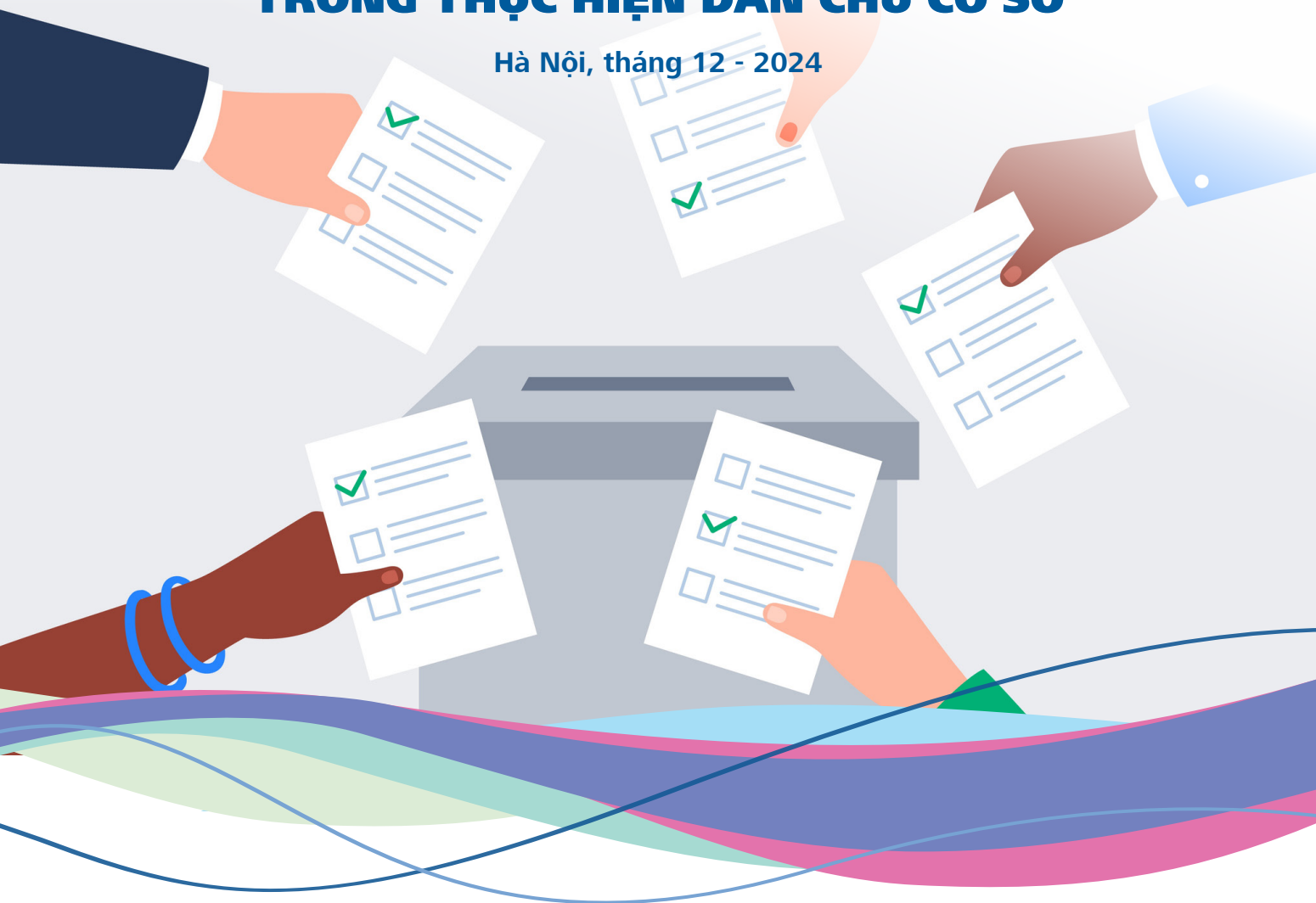


# **BÁO CÁO THAM VẤN**

## **SỰ THAM GIA CỦA NGƯỜI DÂN TRONG THỰC HIỆN DÂN CHỦ CƠ SỞ**

Hà Nội, tháng 12 - 2024



### **REPORT**

## **PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN IMPLEMENTING GRASSROOTS DEMOCRACY**

Hanoi, December 2024

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# Abbreviations

<b>FES</b>	: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
<b>HCMA</b>	: Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics
<b>IOC</b>	: Intelligent Operation Center
<b>L&amp;M</b>	: Leadership and Management
<b>PAPI</b>	: Vietnam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index
<b>UNDP</b>	: United Nations Development Programme
<b>ViLEAP</b>	: Institute of Leadership and Public Policy

# Acknowledgements

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The research team also appreciates the valuable contributions and assessments of experts and scientists at the consultation roundtable “People’s participation in implementing grassroots democracy” co-organised by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Vietnam and the Institute of Leadership and Public Policy (ViLEAP) at the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics (HCMA) on 2 August 2024. Their comments have been carefully considered, analysed, and included in this report.

We would like to express our special thanks to FES Vietnam for their cooperation with ViLEAP and the research team to complete this report. The contents of the report, along with any misinterpretation, are entirely the responsibility of the research team and do not necessarily reflect the views of FES Vietnam or ViLEAP.

# Part 1: Introduction

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## 1. Context of the Research

Democracy is a goal and value of humanity as well as a progressive form of government. Significant efforts have been made to advance democracy around the world at different levels, including the grassroots. However, a truly democratic society in which “all people are born free and equal in dignity and rights”<sup>1</sup> remains an ongoing struggle. Regional and global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, armed conflict, migration, poverty and hunger, social polarisation, and the development of modern technology pose significant challenges for global democracy, particularly for disadvantaged groups like women, the elderly, and ethnic minorities.

Since its founding, the Communist Party of Vietnam (the Party) has made determined and consistent efforts to realise the goal of building a democratic state: Of the people, by the people, and for the people.<sup>2</sup> In the Platform for National Construction in the Transitional Period to Socialism (supplemented and developed in 2011), the Party affirmed: “Socialist democracy is the essence of our regime; the goal and the

driving force of national development. Building and gradually perfecting socialist democracy, ensuring that democracy is implemented in real life at each level, in all fields”.<sup>3</sup> The 13<sup>th</sup> National Congress (2021) outlined a determination to consistently implement the motto “people know, people discuss, people do, people inspect, people supervise, people benefit”<sup>4</sup> while also emphasising the proper and effective implementation of direct and representative democracy, especially at the grassroots level.<sup>5</sup>

On that basis, the state has issued many legal documents to implement democracy in general and grassroots democracy in particular. For instance, Article 3 of the 2013 Constitution states: “The State ensures and promotes the people’s right to mastery; recognises, respects, protects, and guarantees human rights and civil rights”. Previously, in 1998, the Politburo issued Directive No. 30/CT-TW on building and implementing grassroots democracy regulations, creating an important political foundation on which to build a system of policies and laws on practising grassroots democracy in Vietnam. Two key regulations include Resolution No. 45-1998/NQ-UBTVQH10 dated 26 February 1998 of the National Assembly Standing Committee

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- 1 Gudmundur Alfredsson and Asbjørn Eide (2011), Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948: *The Common Goal of Humanity* (translated by Hoàng Hồng Trang, Nguyễn Hải Yến, and Nguyễn Thị Xuân Sơn). The Social Labour Publishing House, Hanoi, p. 44.
  - 2 In this report, the word “people” (in Vietnamese - “Người dân”, “Nhân dân”) is understood as “citizen” according to the provisions of the Constitution and laws of Vietnam.
  - 3 The Communist Party of Vietnam (2021). Documents of the 11<sup>th</sup> National Party Congress. National Politics Publishing House, Hanoi, p. 84-85.
  - 4 This means that, in the process of implementing the contents and work as prescribed by the Constitution and laws of Vietnam at the commune level, residential communities, state agencies, public service units, and the people have the right to **know** (to be provided with information, except for state secrets, or information that has not been made public); to **discuss** (to participate in discussions or to give opinions and decisions); to **do** (to participate in implementation or to contribute to common work); to **inspect and supervise** (to participate in monitoring and inspecting the work that the people discussed and decided to implement and in the organisation of grassroots democracy and the implementation of policies and laws of commune-level authorities, cadres, and civil servants); and to **enjoy** (to enjoy the common benefits and welfare brought about by the common work of the community as discussed, decided upon, and jointly implemented by the people).
  - 5 The Communist Party of Vietnam (2021). Documents of the 13<sup>th</sup> National Party Congress, National Politics Publishing House, Hanoi, p. 173.

promulgating regulations on implementing democracy in communes, wards, and towns; and Decree No. 29/1998/ND-CP dated 11 May 1998 of the Government promulgating regulations on implementing democracy in communes. After five years of implementation, and based on a summary of its practical application, the Central Party Secretariat issued Directive No. 10-CT/TW dated 28 March 2002 on continuing to promote the development and implementation of grassroots democracy regulations. Following this, the Government issued Decree No. 79/2003/ND-CP dated 7 July 2003 on the regulations on implementing democracy at the commune level, replacing Decree No. 29/1998/ND-CP focusing on strengthening the role and responsibility of the commune-level government in implementing grassroots democracy.

In 2007, the Standing Committee of the National Assembly issued Ordinance No. 34/2007/PL-UBTVQH11 (Ordinance 34) on implementing democracy in communes, wards, and towns, replacing Decree No. 79/2003/ND-CP. In 2022, after 15 years of implementing Ordinance 34, based on a summary of practices and in response to new requirements and situations, the National Assembly issued the Law on Implementing Democracy at the Grassroots Level, effective from 1 July 2023. Compared to Ordinance 34, this law added one principle and amended and supplemented several others to further improve the organisation and implementation of grassroots democracy. In addition, it clarified the rights and obligations of citizens in implementing grassroots democracy. In particular, for the first time, the “beneficiary rights of citizens” were set out in law to concretise the latest position on the view that “the people are the ones who benefit” from implementing grassroots democracy according to the 13<sup>th</sup> National Party Congress (2021). In addition, the law also recognised the conditions for ensuring the implementation of grassroots democracy, including prohibiting acts and handling violations. Thus, the Law on

Implementing Democracy at the Grassroots Level has the highest legal value and the most complete regulations on the implementation of grassroots democracy in Vietnam. Its publication demonstrates Vietnam’s continuous efforts to ensure and promote grassroots democracy in the new context.

In the process of implementing the above policies and guidelines, Vietnam has achieved many important results. For instance, awareness of democracy and the democratic practices of Party committees, authorities, the Fatherland Front, socio-political organisations, civil servants, Party members, and the people has risen. In doing so, the potential, creativity, and opinions of the people have been mobilised and promoted in planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating socio-economic development policies and guidelines. Meanwhile, democratic practices in both Party and society have expanded.<sup>6</sup>

However, implementing grassroots democracy in Vietnam is not without its challenges. Firstly, some policies have been partially or only formally implemented. Secondly, peoples’ right to mastery has, in some places, been violated or disrespected. Thirdly, the principle of “people know, people discuss, people do, people inspect, and people benefit” still causes confusion in its implementation at the grassroots level. This reality, together with the context in which Vietnam has been rearranging administrative units at district and commune levels (as per Resolution No. 35/2023/UBTVQH15 of the National Assembly Standing Committee dated 12 July 2023) and implementing the National Strategy on Digital Transformation to 2030, makes a study of people’s participation in the process of social governance and practising grassroots democracy increasingly necessary.

## 2. Objectives of the Research

This report analyses people’s participation and the role of the grassroots political system in the

6 Ngô Văn Sỹ (2021), Assessing 20 years of implementing the policy of grassroots democracy, Online Communist Magazine. Available at: <https://www.tapchicongsan.org.vn/web/guest/thuc-tien-kinh-nghiem1/-/2018/821526/nhin-lai-hon-20-nam-thuc-hien-quy-che-dan-chu-o-co-so.aspx>



implementation of grassroots democracy and the factors affecting it based on observations in the city of Hanoi and Bac Ninh province. From this, it proposes solutions and recommendations to ensure and promote people's participation in the political and social life of the country and localities in the future.

### 3. Research questions

1. How have people participated in the process of implementing grassroots democracy?
2. What roles have the grassroots political systems (including residential groups and villages) of Hanoi and Bac Ninh province played in ensuring the implementation of grassroots democracy?
3. Which factors affect people's participation and the role of the grassroots political system in implementing grassroots democracy?

### 4. Data collection method

The data in this report was collected from the following sources:

**4.1. Surveys:** Direct surveys using printed questionnaires (semi-open questions) of 200 civil servants in the grassroots political system and members of the management boards of residential groups and villages of four communes and wards in Hanoi and Bac Ninh province. Surveys were conducted in Co Nhue 2 ward (Bac Tu Liem district) and Hat Mon commune (Phuc Tho district) in Hanoi, and Vu Ninh ward (Bac Ninh city) and Mo Dao commune (Que Vo town) in Bac Ninh province. Surveys were divided equally among the research areas: 100 questionnaires in two communes and wards in two districts of Hanoi and 100 questionnaires in two communes and wards in two cities and towns of Bac Ninh province. The survey data was processed and analysed using SPSS statistical software, version 27.0.

**4.2. In-depth interviews:** The research team conducted in-depth interviews with a number of prepared questions with 40 civil servants in

the grassroots political system, the management boards of residential groups and villages, and 25 residents in four communes and wards of Hanoi and Bac Ninh province. Ten in-depth interviews were conducted with civil servants and five with residents in each selected commune and ward. Exceptionally, the research team conducted five more in-depth interviews with people in Co Nhue 2 ward (Bac Tu Liem district, Hanoi) than originally planned. This locality is experiencing rapid urbanisation and has a large and diverse population (retirees, police officers, military workers, immigrants, etc.) with fairly high levels of education and participation in grassroots democracy.

#### **4.3. Collecting data from in-depth discussions with officials, civil servants, and residents**

The research team conducted eight discussions:

- In Hanoi: Four discussions with leaders of the Bac Tu Liem District Party Committee and the Phuc Tho District Party Committee and the Party Committee, People's Council, People's Committee, Vietnam Fatherland Front, socio-political organisations, representatives of the management boards of residential groups and villages, and people in Co Nhue 2 ward (Bac Tu Liem district) and Hat Mon commune (Phuc Tho district).

- In Bac Ninh province: Four discussions with leaders of the Bac Ninh City Party Committee and the Que Vo Town Party Committee and the Party Committee, People's Council, People's Committee, Vietnam Fatherland Front, socio-political organisations, representatives of the management boards of residential groups and villages, and people in Vu Ninh ward (Bac Ninh city) and Mo Dao commune (Que Vo town).

#### **4.4. Data collection from documents, reports, and scientific publications**

Part of the original dataset of the 2023 Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI) is used in this report. The common dataset was split into separate datasets for Hanoi and Bac Ninh province and data was mainly processed for Content 1: *"people's participation at the grassroots level"*,

Content 2: *"publicity and transparency in decision-making"*, and Content 3: *"accountability to the people"*. The reason for this is that there are many indicators reflecting levels of people's participation in grassroots democracy activities. The 2023 PAPI surveyed 1,120 people in Hanoi (5.91% of national questionnaires) and 349 people in Bac Ninh province (1.84% of national questionnaires).

Various reports and scientific publications from domestic and international organisations, research institutes, and training institutions are used in this report, as is data and information provided by localities.

## 5. Limitations of the Research

This report would be of more value if the research team had had enough time to work with other commune-level political systems in Hanoi and Bac Ninh province, such as those with a large number of ethnic minorities, difficult geographical conditions, industrial parks, and various good models and effective methods of implementing grassroots democracy.

In particular, although we would have liked to, we were unable to approach and talk more with the management boards of residential groups and villages. We were also unable to directly survey people – especially ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, groups of young people, and groups of working-age people – about their grassroots democracy practices. However, these limitations and gaps also present opportunities for us and other researchers to continue to develop and undertake more in-depth research.

## Part 2: Research results

### 2.1. Implementing grassroots democracy from the perspective of people’s participation

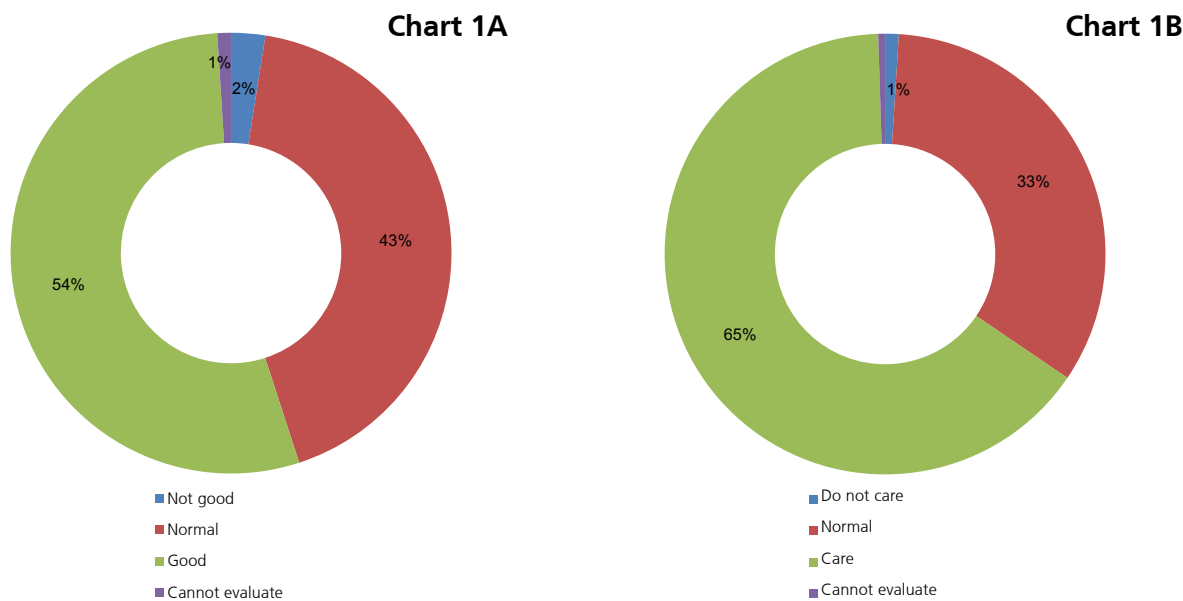
#### 2.1.1. Levels of understanding, expectation, and interest in the implementation of grassroots democracy

People’s levels of understanding, expectation, and interest in grassroots democracy in the two localities are multidimensional, complex, and varied. Of the 200 surveyed civil servants, only 2.5% said that people do not have a good understanding of grassroots democracy (*Chart*

1A) and just 1.0% said that people do not care about this issue in the locality (*Chart 1B*). In-depth interview data shows that most people have heard of and learned about grassroots democracy and the Law on Implementing Democracy at the Grassroots Level (though not in detail). In particular, during in-depth interviews, people showed a fairly good understanding of the principle of “*people know, people discuss, people do, people inspect and supervise, and people benefit*” which has been communicated and implemented by the Party Committee and authorities.

**Chart 1: People’s levels of understanding/interest in grassroots democracy, according to civil servants (%)**

Source: ViLEAP



An analysis of the opinions of 1,469 people in Hanoi and Bac Ninh province shows that they have a good understanding of how village heads and residential group leaders are elected in their place of residence (*Table 1*). In total, 81.28% of people in the two localities know exactly how to choose the head of their village or residential group. In-depth interviews show that most

people in the two localities – when asked – clearly know the names of the Party Secretary, the Chair of the commune or ward People’s Committee, or the head of the residential group or village. They are also interested in who will be the head of the commune-level government and the management board of the self-governing organisation where they live.

**Table 1: Forms of election for the position of head of village/head of residential group (%)**

Source: VILEAP<sup>7</sup>

Form of election	Location		Total
	Hanoi	Bac Ninh province	
Approved by the commune/ward/town level Fatherland Front	0.45	0.29	0.41
Approved by the commune/ward/town level Party Committee	1.43	1.15	1.36
Approved by the commune/ward/town level People's Council	2.14	1.71	2.04
Elected by residents of the locality	79.11	88.25	81.28
Other forms	16.87	8.60	14.91

In addition, people are also interested in many other community issues, typically contributing to and using voluntary funds. One resident said: “[I] regularly participate in [contributing to] funds to support the sea and island area people, child protection, gratitude to war invalids and martyrs, education promotion, poor people, and care for the elderly. These funds are used transparently and for the right purposes”. (Male, 61 years old, retired soldier, Hat Mon commune, Hanoi). This is one of many such comments from people in the two surveyed localities. Along with the above analysis, this indirectly reflects the significant interest of people in performing different tasks related to grassroots democracy in the common interest of the community in which they live.

However, in other respects, people in Hanoi and Bac Ninh province do not have a good understanding of, are uninterested in, and have low expectations (trust) of some contents and tasks related to the implementation of grassroots democracy. Only 52.2% of people remember the exact time of the most recent elections (which took place in 2022 and 2023)

to select village heads or residential group leaders (55.22% in Hanoi and 45.58% in Bac Ninh province). Notably, 71.15% do not know the term length of village and residential group leaders. This rate is higher in Bac Ninh province (82.59%) than Hanoi (62.50%).<sup>8</sup>

This report also analyses some of the reasons why people do not have a thorough understanding of or strong interest in grassroots democracy (Table 2). There are five important reasons, three of which come from the people: Education levels (75.0%), economic hardship (83.4%), and perceptions of the necessity of grassroots democracy (83.4%). The other two reasons concern the capacity of the grassroots political system to organise and implement grassroots democracy policies (75.0%) and the complexity of ensuring and expanding grassroots democracy in Vietnam (83.4%). The influence of these factors on people’s participation in grassroots democracy will be analysed in depth and explained more thoroughly in Section 2.3.

7    Analysed from the dataset of PAPI 2023.

8    Analysed from the dataset of PAPI 2023.

**Table 2: Reasons people do not understand and care about grassroots democracy, according to localities (%)**

Source: ViLEAP

Reasons	Localities		Average
	Hanoi	Bac Ninh province	
1. Life is still economically difficult	100.0	66.7	83.4
2. Grassroots democracy is not necessary	100.0	66.7	83.4
3. The complications of implementing grassroots democracy	100.0	66.7	83.4
4. Education levels	50.0	100.0	75.0
5. Poor implementation of grassroots democracy by the local political system	50.0	100.0	75.0
6. A high proportion of ethnic minority people	50.0	33.3	41.7
7. Ineffective communication campaigns	50.0	33.3	41.7
8. Conditions (geography, information, etc.)	100.0	66.7	83.4

Table 2 also implies that Hanoi needs to pay more attention to improving economic life and raising awareness of the necessity for and true meaning of grassroots democracy for the people. Elaborating further on this, a civil servant said: *“Some people think that publicising and soliciting opinions is not their business and that their opinions have no value. Another group agrees with the content of the solicitation even though it does not directly relate to them”*. (Male, 35 years old, office civil servant, ward People’s Committee, Hanoi). Meanwhile, Bac Ninh province needs to improve people’s awareness and the capacity of the grassroots political system to implement grassroots democracy.

**2.1.2. People’s levels of grassroots democracy practices regarding public activities and tasks in localities**

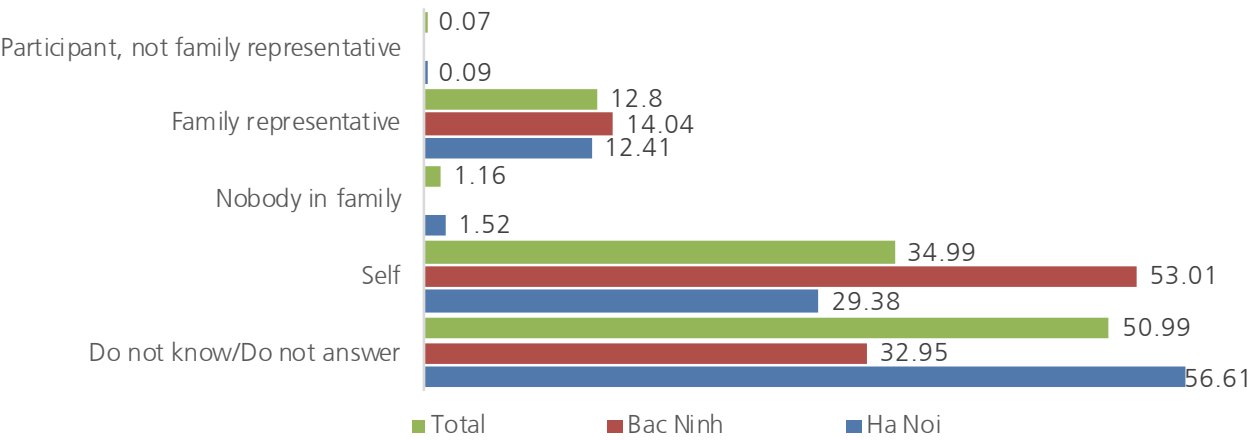
*2.1.2.1. Electing the heads of residential groups (village heads) and commune-level People’s Council deputies*

Research in two localities shows that 47.79% of people said that they or their family

representatives voted for the head of the residential group in the most recent election (Chart 2). Notably, people in Hanoi and Bac Ninh rarely ask others, especially those who do not represent their (or their family’s) views and aspirations, to vote for these positions (0.07%). One resident said: *“I thoroughly read and searched the background and biographies of the candidates. I thought they had sufficient virtue, talent, and educational qualifications according to the criteria, and [that] they would be suitable for the assigned positions. After they were elected, I observed their performance of duties and found that they could do their job well”*. (Female, 60 years old, farmer, Hat Mon commune, Hanoi). Obviously, people are aware of and value exercising their right to vote, especially for positions that are closely related to their lives. However, 50.99% of the surveyed people “do not know” or “do not remember” who voted for these positions in the most recent election, even though the event took place about one to two years ago.

**Chart 2: Family members participating in the election of residential group/village head (%)**

Source: ViLEAP<sup>9</sup>



The rates of people’s participation in the election of commune-level People’s Council deputies for the most recent term in Hanoi and Bac Ninh province are not the same (Chart 3). The overall rate (only 47.17%) is noteworthy for two main reasons.

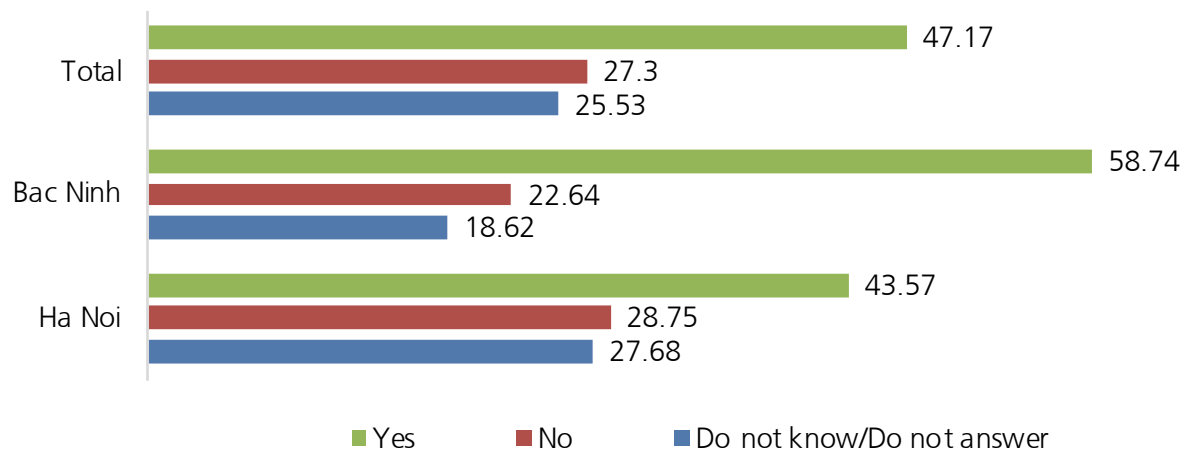
Firstly, People’s Council deputies represent the voice and will of the people (voters). They are entrusted by the people to participate in the local state agency on their behalf to decide important issues in the locality. However, the relatively low rate of people’s participation in the election for commune-level People’s Council deputies shows that people do not really pay attention to the role of this institution. At the same time, it partly reflects a decline in trust in the values and legitimate benefits that People’s Councils and their deputies bring to voters. In reality, the activities of People’s Council deputies are still less clearly recognised and do not often impact the interests of the people compared to other state administrative agencies.

Therefore, it is necessary to raise people’s awareness of the legal status and mission of commune-level People’s Councils and the role of their deputies. More importantly, it is essential to substantively improve the effectiveness and efficiency of People’s Council operations and the representative role of their deputies. Overcoming these issues will contribute to attracting the attention, engagement, and active participation of the people to the process of realising the goal of grassroots democracy.

9    Analysed from the dataset of PAPI 2023.

**Chart 3: Participation in commune People’s Council elections, by locality (%)**

Source: ViLEAP<sup>10</sup>



Secondly, another notable finding is that the rate of people in Hanoi (43.57%) voting for commune-level People’s Council deputies is much lower than that of Bac Ninh province (58.74%). This is quite remarkable because Hanoi is the capital – the national political centre – so levels of people’s awareness and interest in political issues, including grassroots democracy, are expected to be better than in other localities. Through the opinion of a civil servant, this “paradox” is explained quite thoroughly: “The higher and faster the speed of urbanisation in a locality, the more residents [there are] living in that area, the more predominantly [there is a] focus on business and commercial activities by the people. Therefore, local issues [including the implementation of grassroots democracy] have not received much attention”. (Male, 43 years old, office and statistics officer, ward People’s Committee, Hanoi).

2.1.2.2. *Participating in other important activities to contribute to the implementation of grassroots democracy*

Chart 4A describes people’s overall participation in Hanoi and Bac Ninh province in the

maintenance and construction of public works in their locality. In total, only 13.27% of surveyed people have contributed to the construction or maintenance of public works. The rate in Hanoi is just 9.38%, while in Bac Ninh province it is 25.79%. Explaining this, the report of the Party Committee of Mo Dao commune (Que Vo town, Bac Ninh province) mentioned part of the reason: “People are still dependent, relying a lot on the policies of the state, especially financial contributions to the construction of local welfare works”.<sup>11</sup>

Charts 4B and 4C show the specific types of work and resources that people have contributed. Notably, 1.97% of people contributed their resources to repair and build bridges and roads, 1.84% to playgrounds and parks, and 1.09% to village and ward cultural houses (Chart 4B). These cultural institutions and infrastructure projects directly serve the daily needs of the public. This study also shows that people are most likely to agree to monetary contributions when supporting the maintenance and construction of new public works in their locality (10.42%). Other forms of contribution, such as labour days (0.88%)

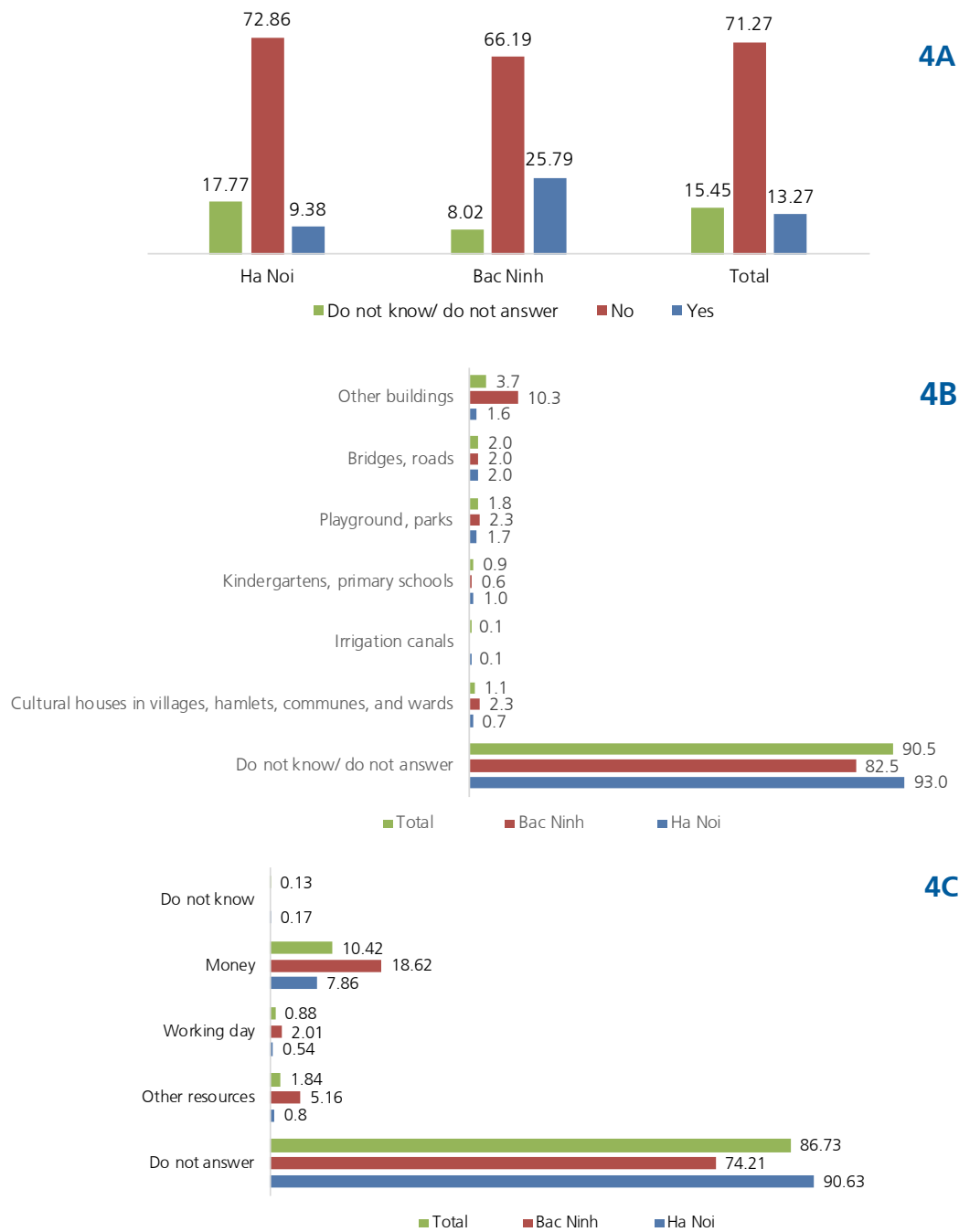
10 Analysed from the dataset of PAPI 2023.  
11 The Party Committee of Mo Dao commune (2024), Report on the implementation of grassroots democracy in Mo Dao commune, Bac Ninh province, p 7.

and other resources (1.84%) have lower rates (*Chart 4C*). In addition, the rate of people who voluntarily contribute money, labour, and other resources to implement public works is 4.61 times higher than involuntary forms (those requested by the government or the head of

the village or residential group).<sup>12</sup> It is clear that people in the two localities are not completely “outside” of community activities which are closely linked to their rights and responsibilities as well as their common and personal interests.

**Chart 4: People’s contributions to the maintenance and construction of public work (%)**

Source: ViLEAP<sup>13</sup>



12 Analysed from the dataset of PAPI 2023.

13 Analysed from the dataset of PAPI 2023.



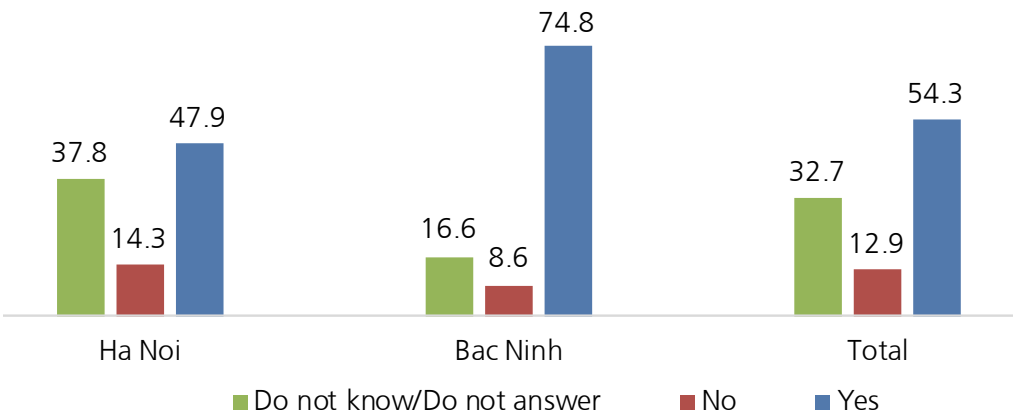
On the same issue, but from another perspective, analysis of PAPI data in 2023 shows that people in Hanoi and Bac Ninh province rarely discuss and decide upon structure and design (5.17%) or provide initial ideas (2.45%) to renovate or build new public works. The reason may be that these activities are specialised and require high technical capacity. Therefore, not everyone can give their opinions, discuss, or make accurate decisions, even on common tasks for the benefit of the community. This finding emphasises the need for the grassroots political system to redesign its processes and methods to be able to mobilise maximum intelligence and resources from the people, even though these

are difficult and complex stages and tasks in the implementation of grassroots democracy.

Meanwhile, 54.3% of people in Hanoi and Bac Ninh province are aware of the list of poor households selected and approved in the past 12 months and publicly announced by the local authorities. This rate is 47.9% in Hanoi and 74.8% in Bac Ninh province (*Chart 5*). In particular, data analysis shows that a relatively high proportion of people know of poor households that missed out (66.5%) or were ineligible but were nevertheless included on the official list of poor households in the past 12 months (69.8%).<sup>14</sup>

**Chart 5: Awareness of the situation of poor households in the locality (%)**

Source: ViLEAP<sup>15</sup>



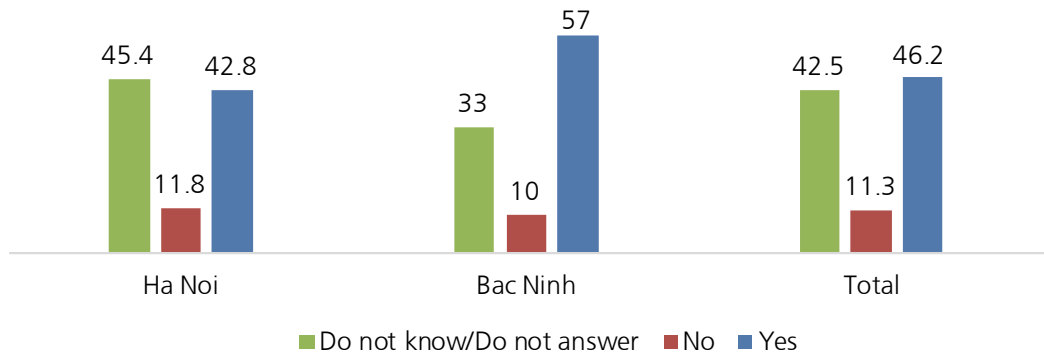
Therefore, the analysis shows the active and close participation of people in monitoring, reviewing, and evaluating the results of poor household assessment by the local government. However, this finding contrasts with the level of people’s participation in the maintenance and construction of public works analysed above. Therefore, reviewing and evaluating the level of public participation and practice in grassroots democracy is clearly a complex task. Evaluations need to be done on a case-by-case basis to reach accurate conclusions.

Chart 6 shows the levels of understanding, monitoring, and comments of people in Hanoi and Bac Ninh province on the financial revenue and expenditure reports of commune-level authorities in the past 12 months. Notably, 46.2% of people know that their local authorities have publicly announced financial revenue and expenditure (Hanoi: 42.8%, Bac Ninh province: 57.0%). However, the level of participation in commenting on these reports is modest. Only 12.9% of people read through financial revenue and expenditure reports and just 1.1% commented and gave feedback on them.<sup>16</sup>

14 Analysed from the dataset of PAPI 2023.  
15 Analysed from the dataset of PAPI 2023.  
16 Analysed from the dataset of PAPI 2023.

Chart 6: Awareness of financial revenue and expenditure reports in the locality (%)

Source: ViLEAP<sup>17</sup>



In short, in implementing grassroots democracy, levels of people’s participation in each locality differ for the same issue. Regarding the principle of “*people know, people discuss, people do, people inspect, supervise, and benefit*”, in reality, people’s participation only happens at the initial level (*listening, knowing, reading, understanding, monitoring, etc.*). Deeper participation (giving feedback and commenting on or monitoring the resolution process, implementation, etc.) remains limited, uncommon, and fraught with difficulties.

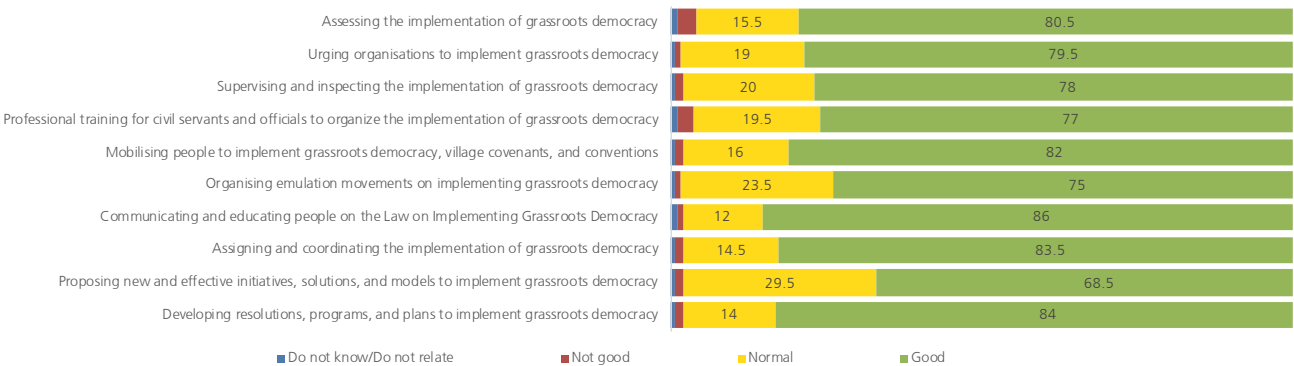
## 2.2. The role of the grassroots political system in implementing grassroots democracy

### 2.2.1. Leadership and management (L&M) to ensure the implementation of grassroots democracy

The impact of the L&M of agencies in the grassroots political system on ensuring the implementation of grassroots democracy, especially the Law on Democracy at the Grassroots Level, is shown through various important activities. Examples include planning and implementing policies and laws on grassroots democracy as well as inspecting, monitoring, and evaluating them. A survey of 200 civil servants in Hanoi and Bac Ninh province showed that 10 L&M activities to ensure the implementation of grassroots democracy were rated as “good” by at least 68.5% of respondents (*Chart 7*).

Chart 7: L&M activities to implement grassroots democracy by the local political system (%)

Source: ViLEAP



17 Analysed from the dataset of PAPI 2023.

In-depth interviews with residents and analysis of reports from communes and wards in the two localities show the efforts and determination of the political system and the executive management boards of residential

groups and villages in L&M to effectively implement the Law on Grassroots Democracy. The activities of the political system in Hat Mon commune, Phuc Tho district, Hanoi, are an example (Box 1).

**Box 1: Hat Mon commune’s implementation of the Law on Grassroots Democracy**

Source: Report of the Party Committee of Hat Mon commune, July 2024

*“Quarterly, the Steering Committee for Grassroots Democracy Implementation (Steering Committee) organises meetings to assess the situation. If necessary, they can hold unscheduled or thematic meetings. To prepare the content for these meetings, the Standing Committee of the Commune Party Committee requires the Standing Committee of the People’s Council, the People’s Committee, the Fatherland Front, and various local party organisations, agencies, and affiliated units to report on the situation and provide relevant documents and information regarding the organisation and implementation of the Law on Grassroots Democracy at the local level. Documents for Steering Committee meetings are sent to members at least two days in advance to ensure the quality of the meetings. The Head or Deputy Head of the Steering Committee chairs these meetings. Members of the Steering Committee are responsible for participating fully and actively contributing their opinions. Depending on the nature of each meeting, the Steering Committee may invite leaders or officers from relevant agencies and units to attend.*

*Additionally, the Commune Party Committee maintains a monthly integrated activity between the Party Executive Committee and the Steering Committee members. This ensures that the tasks and contents of monitoring and pushing the implementation of grassroots democracy are consistently followed up and effectively executed”.*

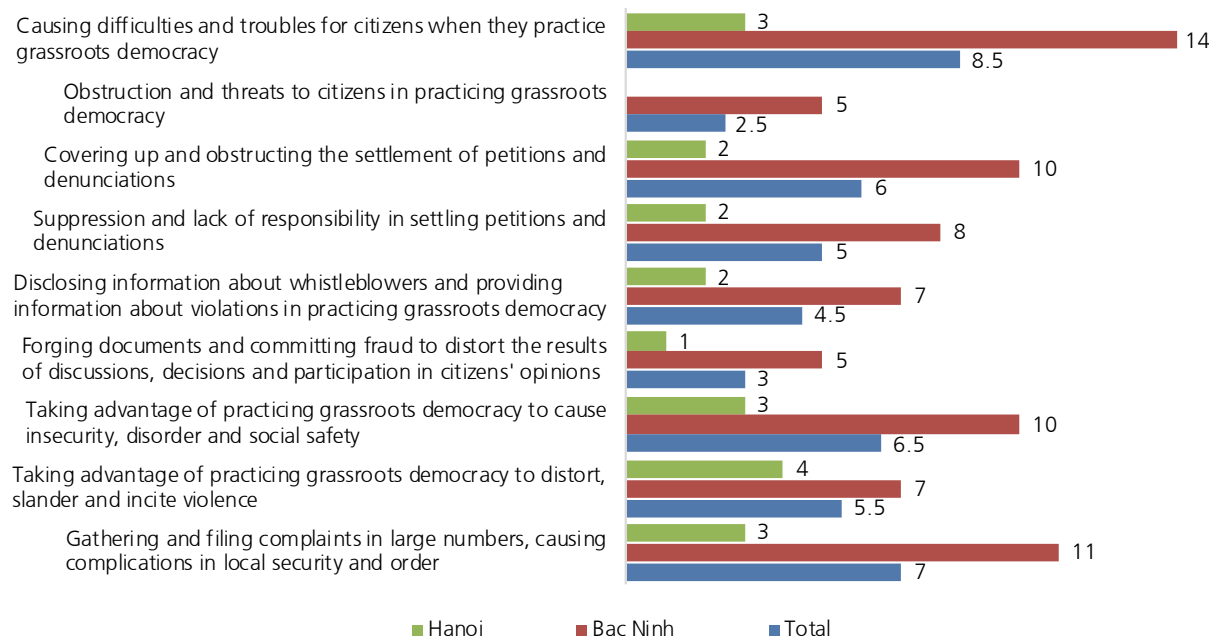
However, Chart 7 also shows that five of the 10 L&M activities of the grassroots political system to ensure grassroots democracy have a lower rate of “good” than the others: (i) Proposing new initiatives, models, and solutions (68.5%); (ii) organising emulation movements (75.0%); (iii) expertise and skills training for specialised teams (77.0%); (iv) monitoring and inspecting (78.0%), and; (v) urging the implementation of policies and guidelines on grassroots democracy (79.5%). This shows that, to effectively implement grassroots democracy, the grassroots political system needs to have more innovative, creative, and breakthrough ways to attract people, integrating emulation in the community. In addition, cadres need to be able to organise the implementation of grassroots democracy (for example, using presentation skills, persuasion, legal knowledge, digital skills, etc.). On the other hand, the grassroots

political system needs to pay more attention to the inspection, supervision, and regular promotion of contents on the implementation of grassroots democracy. This finding helps to highlight the tasks that need to be rectified in each locality, thereby contributing to ensuring better implementation of grassroots democracy in the future.

Chart 8 reflects some of the challenges and limitations of L&M to ensuring grassroots democracy in the research areas. For instance, 8.5% of surveyed civil servants said that citizens still experienced difficulties when they implemented grassroots democracy. Meanwhile, 7.0% of civil servants said that there were still gatherings and mass complaints in the locality (which may be partly related to grassroots democracy implementation, especially regarding difficult, complicated, and sensitive issues such as land).

**Chart 8: L&M challenges in the implementation of grassroots democracy (%)**

Source: ViLEAP



Considering these challenges and limitations in Hanoi and Bac Ninh province, two results are evident: (i) The rate of civil servants in communes and wards in Bac Ninh province facing shortcomings and challenges is much higher than in Hanoi, even higher than the general level, and; (ii) while Hanoi needs to solve the problem of people taking advantage of grassroots democracy to distort, slander, and incite (4.0%), Bac Ninh province needs to direct special attention to difficulties and harassment of citizens implementing grassroots democracy (14.0%), gathering and conducting mass lawsuits (11.0%), and taking advantage of grassroots democracy to cause insecurity and disorder as well as covering up and obstructing the resolution of petitions, complaints, and denunciations (10.0%). A ward civil servant shared more about these difficulties: *“People’s understanding of this principle [‘people know, people discuss, people do, people inspect and supervise, and people benefit’] is not yet widespread or accurate, especially regarding the concepts of “people inspect and supervise” and*

*“people benefit”. As a result, some malicious actors exploit this to incite people to obstruct the execution of public duties and tasks of state agencies”.* (Male, 43 years old, office worker – statistics, a ward People’s Committee, Hanoi).

In implementing grassroots democracy, coordination and support of subjects in the commune-level political system are especially important. Table 3 reflects the opinions of civil servants on the five relationships of leadership, management, coordination, and mutual support of agencies at similar or various levels in the commune and ward political system in residential groups and villages in Hanoi and Bac Ninh province. In general, these relationships were rated as “good” by staff with a fairly high rate (from 81.0%). Through field research, many localities have achieved positive results in implementing grassroots democracy thanks to the close coordination between agencies in the grassroots political system and with self-management institutions. Hat Mon commune, Phuc Tho district, Hanoi is an example (Box 2).

Box 2: An effective coordination mechanism in monitoring community projects

Source: Report of Hat Mon commune Party Committee, 7 July 2024.

*In Hat Mon Commune, the People’s Inspection Board and the Community Investment Supervision Board perform their functions, duties, and supervisory activities according to regulations. They primarily focus on monitoring the implementation of investment projects and construction work in the area; the collection and expenditure of various funds, fees, and contributions from residents; and land management and use in the area. They regularly monitor projects and work in the area. Through their supervision, the Community Investment Supervision Board has promptly made proposals and recommended that investors, authorities, and construction units adjust certain designs to match the actual situation. Notably, the Community Investment Supervision Board discovered an incident where the contractor used composite slabs that did not meet quality standards for the upgrade and renovation of the road from H8 bridge to Hat Mon temple worshipping the Trung Sisters. The Board asked the local government and the investor to inspect the quality of the slabs at the Institute of Science and Technology. After the Institute’s conclusion that the slabs did not meet quality standards, the investor had to replace all the slabs on the road.*

However, some less positive coordination and support relationships in implementing grassroots democracy were also pointed out. Overall, the coordination between the following agencies had the highest “not good” rating: (i) People’s Council and People’s Committee (19.0%); (ii) Party Committee, People’s Council, and People’s Committee (14.5%), and; (iii) People’s Committee and the management board of residential groups

and villages (14.5%). In Hanoi, these issues were repeated. Statistics also showed that the most ineffective coordination mechanism was between the People’s Council and People’s Committee (21.0%). Meanwhile, in Bac Ninh province, the most ineffective coordination mechanism was between the People’s Committee and the management board of residential groups and villages (18.0%) (Table 3).

Table 3: Leadership, coordination, and support among entities in implementing grassroots democracy

Source: ViLEAP

Entities in the local political system	Evaluation	Hanoi		Bac Ninh province		Total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
1. Party Committee, People’s Council, and People’s Committee at the commune level	Not good	12	12.0	17	17.0	29	14.5
	Good	88	88.0	83	83.0	171	85.5
2. People’s Council and People’s Committee	Not good	21	21.0	17	17.0	38	19.0
	Good	79	79.0	83	83.0	162	81.0
3. People’s Committee, Fatherland Front, and socio-political organisations at the commune level	Not good	8	8.0	14	14.0	22	11.0
	Good	92	92.0	86	86.0	178	89.0

Entities in the local political system	Evaluation	Hanoi		Bac Ninh province		Total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
4. People's Committee and the residential group/village management board	Not good	11	11.0	18	18.0	29	14.5
	Good	89	89.0	82	82.0	171	85.5
5. People's Committee, Fatherland Front, and socio-political organisations at the commune level along with the residential group/village management board	Not good	8	8.0	17	17.0	25	12.5
	Good	92	92.0	83	83.0	175	87.5

In-depth discussions and analysis of reports from localities highlights that some shortcomings and difficulties in coordinating the implementation of grassroots democracy are partly due to current institutions and regulations. For instance, Point c, Clause 1, Article 3, Decree No. 59/2023/ND-CP dated 14 August 2023 of the Government<sup>18</sup> states: *“in case the Village Head, Head of Residential Group is also the Head of the Fatherland Front Board...”*. This is inappropriate because the “Village Head or Head of the Residential Group” plays the role of the executor. Meanwhile, the Fatherland Front Board and the Head of the Board supervise the activities of civil servants, Party members, and the Village Head/Head of the Residential Group. In addition, Point d, Clause 1, Article 3 of this Decree also states: *“The Village Head, Head of the Residential Group authorises a member of the Fatherland Front Board...”*. This is also unreasonable, because authorisation in performing tasks is a direction from a superior to their subordinate. In other words, someone cannot authorise an individual (unit) that is not under his/her authority.<sup>19</sup>

**2.2.2. Implementing duties and responsibilities according to the law to ensure grassroots democracy**

The survey of civil servants in Hanoi and Bac Ninh province found that 74.0% assessed the

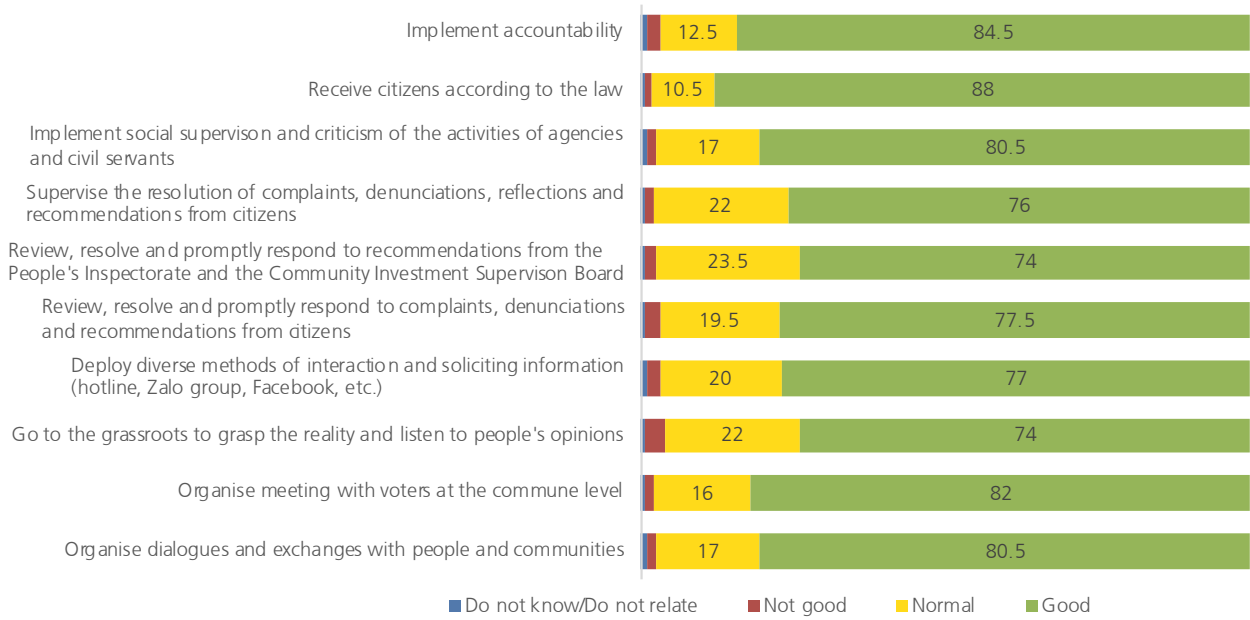
implementation of 10 duties and tasks related to ensuring grassroots democracy according to the Law on Implementing Democracy at the Grassroots Level as “good” (*Chart 9*). According to in-depth interviews with 45 people in these localities, many people agreed that: “The civil servants and leaders are very good, knowledgeable, and enthusiastic; they do their jobs well [in implementing grassroots democracy]”.

18 Decree No. 59/2023/ND-CP dated 14 August 2023 of the Government regulating in details some articles of the Law on Implementing Grassroots Democracy. Hanoi.

19 Party Committee of Co Nhue 2 Ward (2024). Results of leadership, guidance, and implementation of the Law on Implementing Grassroots Democracy in Co Nhue 2 Ward, Hanoi, p 5.

**Chart 9: Implementing duties and responsibilities to ensure grassroots democracy, according to civil servants (%)**

Source: ViLEAP



However, five of the 10 responsibilities and tasks of the grassroots political system and civil servants at this level have the lowest rates of “good”: (i) Going to the grassroots to listen to people’s opinions (74.0%); (ii) considering and resolving recommendations of the People’s Inspectorate and the Community Investment Supervision Board (74.0%); (iii) supervising the resolution of recommendations, complaints, and denunciations (76.0%); (iv) implementing diverse methods of interaction and capturing information from people via hotlines and social networks (77.0%), and; (v) promptly considering and resolving the complaints, denunciations, and recommendations of citizens (77.5%). Through in-depth interviews with civil servants, it is clear that, although there have been efforts made and positive changes in citizen reception and complaint and denunciation settlement, ensuring compliance with the law, many outstanding and prolonged cases remain. A ward civil servant helped to clarify this: “[Receiving citizens and resolving complaints and denunciations is still] outstanding and prolonged, partly because the exchanged officials do not have a thorough understanding of the local situation, especially

in the fields of land, granting certificates, and public utility management”. (Male, 58 years old, civil servant of a ward People’s Committee, Hanoi). The research team believes that, to ensure grassroots democracy, the political system should not only consider and promptly resolve people’s recommendations, complaints, and denunciations, but also closely monitor the results, even though this is a difficult and complicated issue.

Table 4 shows the level of completion of the above five responsibilities and tasks of civil servants in the grassroots political system and the executive boards of residential groups and villages. This enables us to compare grassroots democracy in Hanoi and Bac Ninh province. Both localities need to ensure grassroots democracy through interactive methods, gathering information from people via social networks, and promptly resolve the recommendations of the People’s Inspectorate or the Community Supervision Board (“not good”: 2.0%/locality). Furthermore, while Hanoi needs to pay more attention to monitoring the resolution of and responses to citizen complaints, denunciations,

and recommendations (“not good”: 2.0%), Bac Ninh province needs to increase field trips to the grassroots to listen to public opinion

(5.1%) and promptly consider, resolve, and respond to citizen complaints, denunciations, and recommendations (3.0%).

**Table 4: The level of completion of duties and responsibilities to ensure grassroots democracy, according to localities (%)**

Source: ViLEAP

Duties and responsibilities relating to grassroots democracy	Evaluation	Localities	
		Hanoi	Bac Ninh province
Conducting field visits to understand the reality and listen to residents’ opinions	Not good	2.0	5.1
	Normal	23.0	21.2
	Good	75.0	73.7
Implementing diverse methods of interaction and information gathering from residents (hotlines, Zalo groups, Facebook, etc.)	Not good	2.0	2.0
	Normal	19.0	21.4
	Good	79.0	76.5
Reviewing, resolving, and responding promptly to residents’ complaints, denunciations, and recommendations	Not good	2.0	3.0
	Normal	18.0	21.2
	Good	80.0	75.8
Supervising the resolution of complaints, denunciations, reflections, and recommendations of residents	Not good	2.0	1.0
	Normal	18.0	26.3
	Good	80.0	72.7
Reviewing, resolving, and responding promptly to recommendations of the People’s Inspection Board and the Community Investment Supervision Board	Not good	2.0	2.0
	Normal	21.0	26.3
	Good	77.0	71.7

Improving the public service relationship between government and the people while also promoting the implementation of grassroots democracy in the digital context requires

special attention in Vietnam.<sup>20 21</sup> The Law on Implementing Grassroots Democracy also emphasises the importance of: “*Supporting and encouraging the application of information*

20 Resolution No. 52-NQ/TW dated 27 September 2019 of the Politburo on a number of guidelines and policies to proactively participate in the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

21 Decision No. 749/QĐ-TTg dated 3 June 2020 of the Prime Minister approving the National Digital Transformation Programme to 2025, with a vision to 2030; Decision No. 942/QĐ-TTg dated 15 June 2021 of the Prime Minister approving the Strategy for e-Government Development towards Digital Government for the 2021-2025 period, with a vision to 2030; Decision No. 411/QĐ-TTg dated 31 March 2022 of the Prime Minister approving the National Strategy for Digital Economy and Digital Society Development to 2025, with a vision to 2030.



technology, science and technology, equipping technical means and ensuring other necessary conditions for organising the implementation of democracy at the grassroots level in accordance with the process of building e-government, digital government, and digital society”.<sup>22</sup> Surveying this issue, 74.9% of civil servants

in both localities said that the grassroots political system has done “well” in supporting the application of IT (or digital technology) to implement grassroots democracy. The average rate for handling public administrative procedures online is 78.4%. The ratings of “not good” are both below 5.0% (Chart 10).

**Chart 10: Promoting and leveraging digital technology to improve grassroots democracy (%)**

Source: ViLEAP

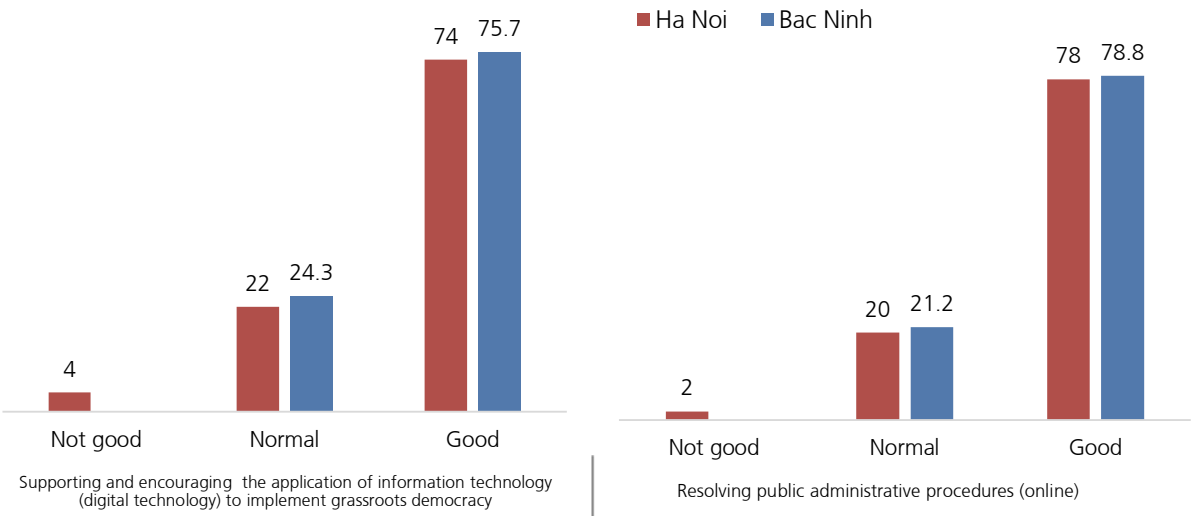


Chart 10 also shows that, although Hanoi has achieved many positive results in supporting and promoting the application of digital technology to implement grassroots democracy and online public services, civil servants evaluated these as “not good” more often than in Bac Ninh province (4.0% and 2.0%, respectively). This difference is not significant. However, it can be assumed that, with rapid and high urbanisation and as the political center of the country, Hanoi appears to be under a lot of pressure from increasing people’s expectations compared to other localities in applying information and digital technologies to improve grassroots practices and governance. Digital transformation opens up new opportunities, spaces, and methods to implement grassroots democracy. People’s expectations are relatively high. However, the transition to modern digital

governance, including grassroots democracy in the digital age in Hanoi and Bac Ninh province, is not simple.

When considering the roles and responsibilities of civil servants in the grassroots political system, community self-management institutions also need to be analysed. This study shows that most people believe that the People’s Inspection Board and the Community Investment Supervision Board have been relatively successful, enthusiastic, and responsible in representing local people in supervising the implementation of public construction projects (bridges, roads, schools, cultural houses, parks, playgrounds, etc.). However, these institutions also face many difficulties. These include a lack of financial support; difficulty in finding people to replace or supplement staff; a lack of specialised expertise (finance, design, basic construction, etc.); and

22 Clause 5, Article 8, the Law on Implementing Grassroots Democracy 2022.

their members are mostly older people or retired officials. Moreover, these institutions struggle to be effective in communes and wards scattered across large areas with divided populations thanks to their current structure, number, and methods of election and staff recruitment. The testimony of a civil servant clarifies this issue: *"The People's Inspectorate and the Investment Supervision Board in the community operate effectively and fully perform their tasks. However, there are currently no allowances for members, so people are not encouraged to participate. The Vice Chairman of the Fatherland Front is not allowed to hold the position of Head of the People's Inspectorate, in particular, and non-professional officials are not allowed to hold the position of Head of the People's Inspectorate, making it difficult to gather when performing tasks".* (Male, 33 years old, a justice civil servant of a ward People's Committee, Hanoi).

### 2.3. Factors affecting people's participation and the role of the grassroots political system in implementing grassroots democracy

Through surveys with 200 civil servants in Hanoi and Bac Ninh province, this study has identified various factors impacting the effectiveness and efficiency of implementing grassroots democracy. This is consistent with the opinions of ward officials, for example: *"The factors affecting the implementation of grassroots democracy are very diverse, both objectively and subjectively, such as differences in the level of education of different areas, awareness of law compliance, customs and practices".* (Male, 48 years old, Chair of a ward People's Committee, Hanoi.) More specifically: *"The level of education, democratic practice skills, and sense of responsibility of the people are necessary conditions that directly affect the*

*results of people's participation."* (Female, 44 years old, leader of a Commune Youth Union, Bac Ninh province).

#### 2.3.1. Characteristics of the people

The results of the survey show some factors related to the characteristics of the people, such as their level of education (94.8%), economic potential or financial capacity (88.1%), and their interest in and expectations of grassroots democracy (88.1%). According to civil servants, this factor has the strongest impact on implementing grassroots democracy. The reports provided by localities contain some common remarks, for example: *"The awareness of some people is not good. They do not clearly understand their right to be the master of the law. The contents prescribed by the law are only for asking for opinions and contributions. But they request that these contents have to be implemented according to their wishes"... "some people are not even interested, especially in the contents that are not directly related to or [which do not] affect their rights and interests"<sup>23</sup>... "some people do not really understand or intentionally misunderstand the provisions of the Law [Implementing Grassroots Democracy]. They have actions or demands that are not in accordance with their rights under the law. Some people are not interested because they think it does not affect them".<sup>24</sup>*

In addition, the economic characteristics of households in each locality also significantly impact both the effectiveness of implementing the Law on Implementing Grassroots Democracy and their participation in grassroots democratic activities. Many localities have a large number of industrial park workers, young people, and people of working age who are *"still not really interested in [implementing grassroots democracy] because they are absorbed in working, earning a living, and making a living."* (Female, 44 years old, leader of a ward Fatherland Front, Hanoi). Therefore, *they do not have much time to participate in*

23 Party Committee of Mo Dao commune (2024), Report on the implementation of the Law on Grassroots Democracy in Mo Dao commune, Bac Ninh province. p. 9.

24 Party Committee of Co Nhue 2 Ward (2024), Results of leadership, guidance, implementation of the Law on Grassroots Democracy in Co Nhue 2 ward, Hanoi, p. 4.

*community activities or meetings with residential groups, village residents, and voters. As a result, there are a small number of participants, many of whom are elderly.*<sup>25 26</sup>

Notably, locality reports, survey results, and data from the 2023 PAPI show that “benefits” and “expectations” strongly influence the level of interest and active participation of people in implementing grassroots democracy. Regarding this issue, one resident shared: *“Some people only care about the implementation of grassroots democracy when their immediate interests are affected”.* (Male, 63 years old, shop owner, Vu Ninh ward, Bac Ninh province). Some civil servants agreed and even gave specific examples: *“contents that relate to the immediate interests of the people and receive more participation from the people, such as compensation, land clearance, and collection of funds”.* (Male, 48 years old, ward civil servant, Hanoi). Another said: *“People in this ward are most interested in the compensation price for Tay Thang Long street from Van Tien Dung street to Pham Van Dong street. About 300 households are living on the land left by their ancestors, mainly farmers and tailors. The compensation price of their whole land area is not enough to buy an apartment, so people are very concerned and worried [about what will happen] after [the land] is taken by the government”.* (Male, 33 years old, justice officer of a ward People’s Committee, Hanoi).

Of course, contents and tasks where people are encouraged to grasp (know), give their opinions, discuss, decide, and supervise all concern the highest goal of “people are beneficiaries”. However, the close, self-acknowledged, harmonious connection between “individual – community” interests – between “I” (private) interests and “we” (common) interests – in each task and piece of content is not thoroughly understood. In implementing grassroots democracy, people are most concerned with issues that are close to them (both geographically and personally). This is an important motivation for

them to monitor, evaluate, comment, contribute resources, and implement local development programmes and policies.

**2.3.2. Factors related to the capacity and role of L&M of grassroots democracy in the commune-level political system**

The results of the survey show some of the factors mentioned by civil servants, including: (i) The responsibility of the head (88.6%); (ii) coordination between agencies in the commune-level political system (87.0%); (iii) good performance of civil servants and Party members in practicing democracy (performing public duties and working with the people) (85.0%), and; (iv) the capacity to implement policies and laws on grassroots democracy (84.5%). To clarify this finding, the opinion of a union official in a ward was shared: *“Among the factors, the one related to the political system is very important. Because the capacity of the communal civil servant team affects the implementation of democracy in the commune, such as qualifications; knowledge; how to receive, grasp, and resolve people’s opinions; and whether or not people trust the political system in the commune. If people trust [in the capacity of civil servants], they will comply and implement [the contents of the grassroots democracy] well”.* (Female, 44 years old, leader of the Fatherland Front of a ward, Hanoi).

Reports provided by localities show that the enthusiasm and sense of responsibility of people in residential areas and public self-management institutions are sufficient. However, their capacity is still limited. Therefore, when sharing and explaining issues related to the implementation of grassroots democracy, contents have not been made specific, clear, or convincing for the public. The participation of officials in the People’s Inspection Board and the Community Investment Supervision Board is mainly part-time. They do not receive regular training and lack in-depth expertise. This partly affects their

25 Party Committee of Mo Dao commune (2024), Report on the implementation of the Law on Grassroots Democracy in Mo Dao commune, Bac Ninh province, p. 9.

26 Party Committee of Hat Mon commune (2024), Report on the implementation of the Law on Grassroots Democracy, Hanoi, p. 1.

performance. The People's Inspection Board still encounters confusion in many cases. In addition, according to reports from some localities, the grassroots political system has, in some places, not closely monitored implementation. For example, they have not summarised or organised conferences to commend good practice in a timely manner to encourage and spread the implementation of grassroots democracy in the community.<sup>27</sup> In handling petitions, complaints, and denunciations in some localities, there is some evidence of shirking responsibilities. The inspection, supervision, and social criticism of the Vietnam Fatherland Front and grassroots-level union organisations is not strong, even vague and formal in some cases.<sup>28</sup>

**2.3.3. Factors related to objective conditions and environments**

In total, 82.4% of surveyed civil servants in Hanoi and Bac Ninh province believe that the conditions for accessing information – both directly and digitally – significantly affect the implementation of grassroots democracy. In the digital transformation, ensuring grassroots democracy while also taking advantage of new technologies and creating fair opportunities for different social groups, especially the disadvantaged, is also worth considering. In addition, the surveys also show that other factors such as natural geographical conditions (71.0%), religious characteristics (62.2%), or ethnic structures (57.0%) in each locality also affect grassroots democracy and the ability of people to participate in and practice their rights and responsibilities according to the law.

Reports provided by communes and wards of Hanoi and Bac Ninh province highlight some other objective factors:

1. A lack of adequate facilities: Many wards have large populations. However, their meeting rooms and facilities lack capacity according to the Law on Implementing Grassroots Democracy, which states that they must have enough space for over 50% of households, because *“cultural houses do not meet the*

*requirements (for organising conferences) in terms of quantity, people are invited but meeting rooms do not have enough seats”*. Meanwhile, the use of IT for policy dissemination, discussion, consultation, and online voting – although set out in law and encouraged – is still challenging in practice. As one respondent pointed out: *“The majority of residential group leaders are elderly, and retired, so the implementation of tasks [on grassroots democracy] is slow and not well-organised”*. (Female, 40 years old, justice official of a commune People's Committee, Bac Ninh province).

2. Policies to support those who organise the implementation of grassroots democracy: Regulations on policies and allowances to support members of committees (People's Inspection Committees and Community Investment Supervision Committees), villages, residential groups, etc. are slow to be institutionalised. Meanwhile, localities lack resources or are unable to provide timely support.

3. The complexity of ensuring the implementation of grassroots democracy significantly affects the level of people's participation, response, and contribution: This is reflected in the very low percentage of people (households) who provide initial design ideas or participate in discussions and decisions on the design, construction, and repair of public works. Similarly, very few people read, give feedback, or comment on the annual public financial reports of commune-level authorities. From this finding, the grassroots political system needs to realise that expanding and promoting grassroots democracy is the “golden key” to solving challenges in local governance. To do this, the Party Committee, government, and commune-level union organisations need to simplify the complicated contents and tasks in implementing grassroots democracy with processes and measures which can be implemented flexibly and creatively to help people access and participate more easily. In addition, innovating the L&M methods for the grassroots political system is also of special importance.

27 Party Committee of Mo Dao commune (2024), report on the implementation of the Law on Grassroots Democracy in Mo Dao commune, Bac Ninh province, p. 7.

28 Party Committee of Que Vo town (2024), results of implementing grassroots democracy from 2020 to 2024, Bac Ninh province, p. 9-10.

## Part 3: Solutions and Recommendations

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### 3.1. Solutions

#### 3.1.1. Solutions related to people's participation in implementing grassroots democracy

1. Innovate the forms, means, and contents of communication with the people and mobilise them to actively respond to the implementation of grassroots democracy. Specifically:

- More attention should be paid to target groups: Young people, working-age people, and the disadvantaged.
- Replicate traditional means of communication such as leaflets, posters, community meetings, dialogues, meetings with voters, radio, and television through digital applications, digital tools, and social networks (Youtube, Facebook, Zalo, Instagram, TikTok, etc.) in villages, residential groups, and associations. It is also necessary to integrate communication through competitions, dramatisation, and poetry into the activities of art clubs, elderly associations, and retirement groups. One senior citizen suggested a principal issue in organising the implementation of grassroots democracy (including communication): *"Grassroots democracy in the market economy period must have different forms and methods"*. (Male, 63 years old, head of a residential group's management board, Bac Ninh province).

Dissemination needs to be flexibly integrated into important events and programmes of residential areas such as building "model roads", "smart people's mobilisation" movements, and implementing national target programmes.<sup>29</sup>

- Communication contents: It is important to address misconceptions about the implementation of grassroots democracy and prevent the abuse of democratic rights to sow discord, especially online.

2. Research and pilot the establishment of the *"community self-governing groups to implement grassroots democracy"* model alongside the People's Inspectorate and the Community Investment Supervision Board. This model is proposed with the following initial ideas:

- Establishment and tasks: Individuals (groups) or organisations in residential areas (commune, village, and residential group level) interested in solving common problems could propose establishing a group. This group would work to solve urgent, diverse, and complex but close, seasonal problems according to each specific incident arising in the community. Examples could include monitoring the implementation of social policies, ensuring food hygiene and safety at schools, regulating traffic, vaccination and health care, improving the environment, preventing theft, eliminating social evils, managing life in apartment buildings, etc. These problems are diverse and urgent, however, the People's Inspectorate and the Community Investment Supervision Board do not always have the authority, capacity, and resources to solve them all.
- Legal status: Initially, this model should be "sponsored" (managed, monitored, and supported) by the Vietnam Fatherland Front or a socio-political organisation with functions related to the issue that the group aims to solve. There would be no need for elections in the community like current self-governing organisations. Instead, streamlined and flexible establishment procedures should be prioritised. For example, "self-governing community groups" to help women suffering from domestic violence could be "sponsored" by the commune-level Women's Union.

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<sup>29</sup> National target programme on sustainable poverty reduction, national target programme on new rural construction, and national target programme on socio-economic development in ethnic minority and mountainous areas.

- Members could include founders, individuals (groups), and prestigious volunteers who support the goals and methods of solving the problems that the group was established to address, with additional representatives from “sponsoring” agencies. The number of members is not fixed and there is no term limit. The group will dissolve once the issue it pursues has been resolved.

- Operating expenses: May be covered by grants, sponsorship, or provided for free.

- Main activities: Monitoring, supporting implementation, or calling for and mobilising the community to participate in solving social problems in their place of residence for common benefit.

- Operating principles: (i) Accessibility (information, documents, etc.); (ii) locality (localisation); (iii) simplicity, flexibility, and non-administratisation; (iv) supporting factors (legal status, authority, finance, etc.), and; (v) volunteering for the benefit of the community.

- Difference: Each group, when performing its tasks, would be trained and equipped with basic and essential knowledge and skills on the problem to be solved. This could be supported by the Vietnam Fatherland Front at the commune level or a “sponsoring” organisation – a specialised unit that supports training. From this, practical capacity in grassroots democracy (supervision skills, task performance, etc.) will help improve the connection between the group and the community as well as with the government in the process of solving common problems.

### **3.1.2. Solutions related to the L&M capacity of the grassroots political system in ensuring the implementation of grassroots democracy**

1. Improve awareness and capacity of L&M and ensure grassroots democracy for civil servants in the grassroots political system. Specifically:

- Research and pilot an “online digital science repository on grassroots democracy”. This repository (books, newspapers, videos, infographics, etc.) would collect lectures, good practice, shared experiences, and initiatives on leadership and the implementation of grassroots democracy. It could be integrated and periodically updated on the website of the District People’s Committee or the Provincial Online Public Service Portal, or included as a new function on the VNeID application – the mass open online learning platform at: <https://onetouch.mic.gov.vn/>. Civil servants and Party members could register to learn and study at any time and have specific, automatic confirmation of results on the system.

- Allocate funds for regular training and refresher courses, which should include specialised topics specific to each locality. Public self-governing organisations need to have their own training and refresher programmes designed to meet their needs.

- Organise regular exchanges and discussions to share and summarise experiences in solving and handling emerging issues, especially “hot” and “prominent” topics in implementing grassroots democracy, for local agencies, units, and organisations and with other localities in person and online.

2. Promote the role of leaders in villages, residential groups, the Fatherland Front Work Committee, and mass organisations by increasing visits to the grassroots to listen to, understand, and orient public opinions. This should be combined with the maximum exploitation of the “social listening” feature of localities’ Intelligent Operation Center (IOC) systems. In Hanoi, the “Digital Capital Citizen

- *iHanoi*<sup>30</sup> app also needs to be used and expanded to its full potential. This data needs to be updated daily and quickly shared with the grassroots political system for processing, regular monitoring, and timely response.

3. Competent agencies in the grassroots political system should promptly allocate annual budgets to serve the implementation of the Law on Grassroots Democracy. Commune-level People's Councils and People's Committees should issue resolutions and decisions on stable and reasonable allocation of funds to support the activities (training, allowances, etc.) of the executive boards of residential groups and villages, the People's Inspection Board, and the Community Investment Supervision Board based on the proposals of these organisations and the commune-level Fatherland Front.

In addition, the provincial People's Council should consider increasing the monthly allowance for these or related organisations and individuals who implement the Law on Grassroots Democracy in accordance with the local budget and the national salary increment policy.

4. Every year, the commune-level Party Committee should issue resolutions and directives to promote leadership in implementing the Law on Grassroots Democracy. The People's Committee, the Fatherland Front, and commune-level socio-political organisations need a joint action plan to implement the goals and tasks of ensuring grassroots democracy in their locality while also integrating it into the implementation of annual and long-term socio-economic goals.

## 3.2. Recommendations for the government, local authorities, and other stakeholders

1. Review, adjust, and provide consistent nationwide guidance to overcome some shortcomings in Decree No. 59/2023/ND-CP:

- For Clause 1, Article 3, adjust the wording and re-regulate the relationship between the Village Head, Head of the Residential Group, and the Head of the Committee of the Fatherland Front.

- For sub-section 2, the Law on Implementing Grassroots Democracy is specified in Article 13, Decree No. 59/2023/ND-CP when mentioning the number of People's Inspection Committees in communes, wards, and towns. We propose that, if the number of committees at the commune level is kept the same, as prescribed, additional People's Inspection Committees should be permitted in villages and residential groups with big populations and large, scattered, geographically separate areas. This is important because our study highlights that people participate most effectively in issues that are close to them both physically and personally. Moreover, when participating in monitoring activities at the village level, they will find it easier and be more confident reporting the issue to the commune-level government.

- Sub-section 3 of the Law on Implementing Grassroots Democracy, specified in Clause 1, Article 17 of Decree No. 59/2023/ND-CP

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30 The "*Digital Capital Citizen - iHanoi*" app was launched to connect people and businesses with city authorities at all levels. One of the highlights of the app is the "Hanoi Connect" function that helps people and businesses interact with government agencies more easily. People can report on-the-scene (send feedback to authorities at all levels about pressing issues in their lives); reflect on administrative procedures (e.g., delayed behaviour, causing trouble, failure to properly implement regulations of civil servants in handling administrative procedures, and late handling of administrative procedures); or register or support others to register "to receive citizens" with the Hanoi City Citizen Reception Committee.

- Function – "Hanoi Life": Provides smart urban utility features such as traffic monitoring, bus route search, electronic health book, education information, environment, tourism, and online payment. The app also provides entertainment through TV360, bringing convenience and intelligence to daily life in Hanoi.

- Function – "Hanoi News": Up-to-date news from Hanoi and information, economic, and social news through digital newspapers.

- Function – "Initiatives and suggestions": Support people to send ideas and initiatives to contribute to the development of the capital.



describing the election and additional election of members of the Community Investment Supervision Board is unreasonable and can cause difficulties and inconveniences for people. This decree should be adjusted so that it is not necessary to organise community meetings to elect and/or hold additional elections for personnel for this board.

2. The government and local authorities should research, pilot, and improve the Grassroots Democracy Index. Many countries in the OECD use this index (nine criteria, maximum 25 points/criteria) to measure and rank their own social democracy. In Vietnam, over the past 15 years, many indicators in the PAPI measurement axes have closely reflected the status of people's participation in grassroots democracy.

3. For Hanoi and Bac Ninh province, it is necessary to swiftly issue regulations on the organisation and operation of residential groups and villages in conjunction with the implementation of new contents of the Law on Implementing Grassroots Democracy and Decree No. 59/2023/ND-CP of the Government guiding a number of articles of this law. In particular, the regulations need to consider institutional issues of concern in implementing grassroots democracy such as financial support for self-governing institutions, instructions on online voting, and online voting applications. On this basis, the authorities of Bac Tu Liem district, Phuc Tho district, Bac Ninh city, and Que Vo town should promptly issue and implement detailed instructions on online voting, apply it to local electronic information portals, and publicly introduce them so that commune-level authorities, residential groups, and villages can easily access and implement them.

4. Expand the subjects participating in social supervision and pay attention to the role of social organisations, press agencies, and new models proposed and initiated by individuals (groups) (and "sponsored" by organisations in the commune-level political system) to jointly solve common problems in the community. These are useful institutions, even without state spending, and have simple organisational structures. However, their participation will

create a closer bridge between people and government to jointly solve common problems in residential areas.

5. The central government should adjust the methods and mechanisms for approving, allocating, and receiving operating support funds from the state budget for self-governing institutions (villages, residential groups, People's Inspection Committees, and Community Investment Supervision Committees), even the Fatherland Front and commune-level socio-political organisations, replacing the current method of receiving funds from the same level of government. This will more effectively promote the position and capacity of monitoring as well as the real social criticism of these organisations for common tasks in the locality.

6. Innovate the personnel structure of the executive board of residential groups and villages to increase the participation of young people. Many mass self-governing organisations have executive boards that mainly consist of retired civil servants and senior citizens. For many enthusiastic young people – such as union members and those in residential areas, villages, residential groups, etc. – if a mechanism existed to motivate them, it could help to gradually rejuvenate the executive boards of self-governing organisations. From there, these institutions would combine the prestige and experience of senior citizens with the energy, acumen, and technological skills of younger people.



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