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**PROMOTING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN
LOCAL GOVERNANCE:**
Case of the new rural construction Program in Binh Chanh
district, Ho Chi Minh City

Faculty of Management and Business

Master's thesis

October 2019

ABSTRACT

Huynh Vu Long: Promoting citizen participation in local governance: Case of the new rural construction Program in Binh Chanh district, Ho Chi Minh City
Master's thesis
Tampere University
Master' Degree Program in Public Administration
October 2019

In the direction of enhanced democracy, citizen participation in public administration is also increasingly playing an important role in the process of sustainable development in developing countries. This study explores understanding of participation, barriers to participation as well as how to increase citizen participation in local governance. This study shows evidence of the importance of citizen participation in local governance. In other words, citizen participation helps the government to have better governance practices as well as contribute to ensuring the transparency, responsibility and efficiency of local government. Especially in the rural development program in Vietnam, citizen participation will help the locality have more resources for the new rural development process. This study was conducted by a case study in Binh Chanh district in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The study used qualitative methods and the emerging approach, the stakeholder approach and theories of public participation in governance to understand this phenomenon. In-depth interviews and secondary data use as the main data source. Specifically, data from interviews with 16 local people (in 3 groups: citizens; elected representatives; local officials) show differences in perceptions of participation and barriers as well as ways to increase citizen participation in local governance.

This research contributes to knowledge related to participatory governance by clarifying the concept of participation, identifying barriers to participation as well as examining how citizens overcome through these barriers, or in other words, to increase citizen participation in governance activities. The study has profound that participation in local governance or greater empowerment of citizens in final decisions can strengthen democracy as well as limit mistakes in governance.

Keywords: citizen participation, new rural construction, citizen empowerment, democracy

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin Originality Check service.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The process of economic growth and social development always requires the contribution of citizens. In addition to factors that play an important role in the sustainability of a nation, the human factor is always considered a decisive factor. Accordingly, citizen participation in state management has been given more attention at the global level. Specifically, the question relates to the way in which citizens participate in state management? How to facilitate and encourage citizen participation? Moreover, how to ensure rights and interests of citizen when participating in local governance has been in the research interests by scholars around the world.

For the developed countries, enhancing citizen participation is not always a simple issue. Factor affecting to citizen participation varies between urban areas with diverse population and rural areas. Especially with the areas of interference between cities and rural areas, whether the issue of citizen participation should be strengthened is a question to be answered (Oliver, as cited in Nguyen et al., 2015). In this case, therefore, Vietnam is a place to study the relationship between public governance and citizen participation. Specifically, Binh Chanh district (Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam) is one of many districts across the country implementing a new rural construction Program on the basis of rapid urbanization, which will provide practical evidence to understand the importance of citizen participation in local governance.

1.1 The problem of citizen participation in Vietnamese governance

Governance can be defined in many different ways, but it generally refers to mobilizing elements such as money-assets, human resources, organization, and other factors into public administration. Although it may involve executing the power of leaders or sharing that power with the citizens as well as other subjects, the main consideration is the gaining of consensus to resolve public issues, providing public services and ensuring community benefits. History has had many evidences of the transformation of the concept of "government" to the concept of "governance" as an inevitable process of the process of strengthening new democracy around the globe. Based on the increasing demands on public management efficiency, actors participating in the political system are increasingly expanded on the basis of the allocation and adjustment of rights, obligations and responsibilities between the stakeholders. The Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Commission on Human Rights, Resolution 2000/64) emphasized that good and reasonable governance play a critical role to achieve the goal of each country. It requires assurance of issues related to: "Full respect of human rights; the rule of law, effective participation, multi-actor partnerships, political pluralism, transparent and accountable

processes and institutions, efficient and effective public sector, legitimacy, access to knowledge, information and education, political empowerment of people, equity, sustainability, attitudes and values that foster responsibility, solidarity and tolerance” (Ibid.). Therefore, citizens play a critical role in promoting good governance, especially local governance, which helps ensure transparency, accountability and efficiency. The level of participation of citizen in governance depends on the rules of the governance system, civic civilian skills and community awareness. (An Assessment of Citizens Participation in Local Governance). It is obvious that citizens are increasingly being attracted by local governments as a channel for understanding local issues and helping communities contribute to the formulation of policies and are part of the decision-making process.

Nowadays, the reform of the management system towards increasing citizen participation in governance is an ongoing trend in developing countries. In particular, many international development organizations are stepping up strong support for developed countries to promote good governance and democracy (M. Adil Khan et al., 2008). In Vietnam, socialist democracy is increasingly expanded in content, specifically democratic in politics, economy, culture, society and at all levels from central to local levels, to each citizen by forms of representative democracy and direct democracy. Because the Socialist State of Vietnam is an authority of the people, by the people and for the people, therefore, only when people really play an important role in the process of state management, then building and perfecting the rule of law, state is really successful. Promoting the participation of the citizen in state management activities requires not only from the integration but also more importantly dawn from the requirements of the renovation process, the development of the market economy and society democracy and of the nature of Vietnam.

However, scholars around the world has pointed out that dialogues between citizen and their elected representatives are limited in many respects, and can be characterized as formal as meetings. In addition, even though the election is based on citizens votes, public administration decisions are based on group benefit (Chowdhury and Aktaruzzaman, 2017). In fact, in Vietnam, participation in state management allows citizens to express their will and aspirations with state agencies in developing policies and laws. However, it must be realized that the participation of citizen in the above process is still difficult and limited. Therefore, clarifying the methods and forms for citizen to participate in the process of developing laws and policies, on the management of the State as well as identifying barriers or difficulties for participation in state management is important and necessary. It can be assumed that the findings of this study can provide new perspectives on the phenomenon of citizen participation as well as more

understanding of barriers affecting citizen participation in local governance as well as in programs and projects, which play an important role in country development.

1.2. Definition of term

This thesis studies citizen participation in local governance on the basis of resolving barriers that negatively affect citizen participation. This section briefly introduces the key concepts used in this thesis and related issues, with many details that will be provided in Chapter 2.

Literature refers to different types of citizen participation. Callahan (2007) indicated that citizen participation means that citizen attends to governance activities of the state through interaction with administrators concentrating on policy issues. In other aspect, Johar (2017) considered it as a tool for empowering citizens to realize their potential and contribute initiatives to local projects and policies. Additionally, citizen participation in local governance is a public opportunity to express their views and try to achieve a level of consensus in the formulation and policy formulation of the state (Mogomotsi et al., 2018). Furthermore, citizen participation in public governance contributed to increase democratic rights in modern society (Rolfé, 2017). Moreover, Chirenje and his colleagues (2013) indicated that local governance with citizen participation opens the way to democracy and depends on the level of participation that democracy increases accordingly. Therefore, when citizen participation in state management is guaranteed, it is a measure of democracy, civilization, freedom and social progress; thereby expressing the good nature of the State (Chirenje et al., 2013). This means that the level of citizen participation in the entire governance process, the process of contributing to the formulation of laws and policies based on direct participation or indirect participation will clearly reflect the efficiency of governance.

In other words, a good governance will focus on and promote human resources in participating in solving social problems which exist and arise in the process of building and developing society. Many different views on citizen participation in state management focus on the development and protection of the entire community. In particular, citizens participate in state management in two forms: Direct and indirect. In the early period of democracy, citizen participation was recognized in the weakening of elections or referendums to express their support or opposition to state activities. In the present age, citizens are motivated to participate in the exercise of ownership, namely the State encourages citizens to join the local government (Tovar, 2015). Detailed description of citizen participation is provided in Chapter 2. Briefly, in the light of reports related to citizen participation, it is conceivable that although there are similarities and differences in the definition, there is also a consensus that citizen participation in

local governance concentrates on enabling citizens to have better access to information of the authority, and ensuring that citizen's voices are heard and their input is received through state representative systems and stakeholders. In this study, citizen participation in local governance refers to the process by which local citizens and local authorities formulate and implement operational programs, prioritize, and conduct activities to serve the local community.

1.3. Main objective for the study

The main objective of this research is to study the phenomenon of citizen participation in local governance and to analyse how the concept of participation is being practiced in Vietnam, using a case study of the new rural construction Program in Binh Chanh district. There is a special emphasis on investigating how the citizens in the district perceive, expect, and ultimately practice participation in local governance. Particularly, this study will explore the barriers affecting the participation of citizen in local governance, thereby proposing solutions to promote civil participation. This study seeks to answer the questions:

1. How is citizen participation understood in the case of new rural construction Program in Binh Chanh district, Ho Chi Minh City?
2. What are the possible barriers for citizen participation and how they could be overcome?

1.4. Purpose and importance of the study

This research not only aims to contribute to the understanding of the citizen participation phenomenon, but also proposes solutions to enhance the role and promote citizen participation in local governance. The significance of this study is that the research can be used as a reference for the competent authorities to set out guidelines and policies to focus on mobilizing citizen participation in local governance for successful implementation the new rural construction Program or other programs and projects in the future with the citizen participation.

The study is constructed as follows. Chapter 1 is the Introduction, which covers the problem of citizen participation in governance in Vietnam, the definition of term, the main objective, the purpose and the important of the study

Chapter 2 presents the literature review. It addresses the review of the literature in the context of previous studies on the research question and other topics related to the subject of study "citizen participation in local governance" phenomenon. Based on the evaluation of previous documents, a conceptual framework will be provided as a research theory guide for the following sections. Additionally, this chapter will also clarify the context of implementing the

new rural construction Program in Vietnam, a program that contributes to promoting citizen participation in local governance. The aim is to provide general information and context for research.

Chapter 3 concentrates on theoretical framework. It will provide the theoretical approach related to citizen participation and present the research question of this study.

Chapter 4 will discuss methods and designs to collect data for the thesis. Furthermore, the rationale for selecting a case study method will also be presented in this chapter.

Chapter 5 will present the findings according to the content determined from data analysis and research questions set out in Chapter 3.

Chapter 6 will concentrate on discussing based on how the findings relate to points in the literary review, to theory, to practice. The thesis closes in Chapter 7 by concluding the meaning and limitations of research, practical implications as well as suggestions for future research

Chapter 2

Literature review

This chapter focuses on reviewing and evaluating literature related to the topic of citizen participation and topics related to the objectives of the research and research questions. The chapter portrays an overview of the findings, related concepts and the main development of the phenomenon of citizen participation in public governance. The main sources of academic materials include articles, scientific articles, academic reports and studies providing rationale and practical contribution to the knowledge related to citizenry participation in public governance.

The purpose that need to be clarified in this literature review stems from the requirements for solving problems from which research questions are posed. Specifically, to focus is on the factors affecting citizen participation, key forms of participation, barriers that limit citizen participation and solutions to enhance citizen participation in public governance in contemporary society. From the review of research literature, it is easy to support as well as lay the foundation for a case study model in which public participation in public governance can be enhanced to achieve higher performance.

The scope of this chapter explores two main aspects. Firstly, perspectives on citizen participation by referring to international literature. Then, from participation of citizen of other countries to the participation of Vietnamese citizen to present the content of the participation of Vietnamese citizen. Scholarly findings of the research question demonstrates barriers to restricting citizen participation and solutions implemented by national governments to enhance participation of citizens on public administration. Secondly, the chapter provides an introduction about new rural construction Program of countries around the world and specific programs in Vietnam.

2.1. Perspectives on citizen participation

2.1.1 Concept of citizen participation

This chapter begins with a short review of the literature regarding the citizen participation in governance. In literature, the term "citizen participation" is also known by other names such as "civic engagement," "public participation", "community participation", "citizen contract", "resident participation" and like. Citizen participation in government can bring many benefits to both sides, in particular, it has the ability to change the ineffective, commanding and controlling culture of the government that originates from outdated public management model (Clark and Guzman, 2016). Nabatchi and Amsler (2014) bring some information about the background of the citizen participation. They indicated that although citizen participation is taking place at all

levels of administration, due to different processes, there are many different views related to participation that have caused much debate on global scope. The authors claim that there is a great need for further research on citizen participation in different civil society contexts. For example, research of Chirenje and his colleagues (2013) has provided evidence for an important of resident participation. They argue that citizen participation is increasingly used in developing countries in areas related to policy making, strengthening democracy, ensuring transparency in government management activities (Chirenje et al., 2013; Svaljek et al., 2019). It has also been explored particularly in by Callahan (2007). Chirenje et al. (2013) indicated that citizen participation means citizens attend to governance activities of the state through interaction with administrators concentrating on policy issues. This concept differs from participation involving voting or participating in local community support. He also affirmed that citizen participation plays an important role in governance decisions. The view of Callahan was against the views of local officials found in the study of Bowman and Kearney (2007) that suggested that citizen participation could hinder established rules. That means in many studies it has been shown that government officials worry that citizen participation in governance can lead to conflict, power sharing and even reduce efficiency of administrative agencies (Nguyen et al., 2015).

Recognizing the importance of citizen participation, Johar (2017) considered it as a tool for empowering citizens to realize their potential and contribute initiatives to local projects and policies. The view of the importance of civic engagement in governance was expanded when Mogomotsi and his colleagues asserted that citizen participation in local governance is a public opportunity to express their views and try to achieve a level of consensus in the formulation and policy formulation of the state (Mogomotsi et al., 2018). The article also emphasizes the need to distinguish between citizen participation in the planning phase and in policy implementation phase. Thus, the role of participation is different at each stage and this affects the success of the policy. However, it is argued that citizen participation in governance is considered important sometimes necessary, and a fundamental right of citizens that allows them to secure and receive an official place in governance. A study by Clark and Guzman (2016) has shown that encouraging citizen participation in government as well as citizen empowerment can be more effective in providing government services. In other words, empowerment promotes citizenship and affects their level of participation. At the same time, empowerment has an impact on citizen satisfaction and, most importantly, it has increased citizen participation in local governance (Aladalah et al., 2015).

In order to promote the ability and enhance citizen participation in common local issues, many authors have considered the concept of citizen participation as a cohesive mechanism that

needs to be promoted. It is argued that citizen participation is a combination of methods to connect citizens together to make a voice so that their ideas and needs are included in government decisions to address the issue is of general importance (Nabatchi and Amsler, 2014). That was successfully established as described by Madzivhandila and Caswell when they cited the Moseti's statement that community participation acts as a tool to narrow the gap between local government, stakeholders and the community in general by developing a common understanding of local situation and programs. They reckoned that citizen participation is a mechanism through which citizens and local stakeholders can participate in local governance issues (Madzivhandila and Caswell, 2014). That has been used in several studies to assess the contributions of citizen in national development projects. Accordingly, community participation can be considered an empowerment tool as it helps local residents to realize their own abilities, participate in activities themselves, even contribute labor and assets to local development goals (Johar, 2017).

Many authors also study citizen participation in public governance based on the guarantee of democratic rights in modern society. Quick and Bryson (2016) argued that citizens are considered important stakeholders because they can participate directly or indirectly in state governance in creating and enforcing policies that affect them, and citizen participation is an important part of state relations on a democratic basis. A recent study by Steve Rolfé (2017) about the definition of good governance concluded that citizen participation ensures transparency and accountability, promotes the development of strong, responsible, united and effective institutions. Moreover, Mikesell (2005) found that facilitating local government in creating opportunities for citizens to participate in the political process has brought freshness to democracy. He appreciated the direct contact of people with local authorities rather than using communication technology as face to face contact can help to create a close relationship among the stakeholders in the decision-making process, thereby enhancing democracy in local management.

The increasing reception of information from the grassroots level and the level of agreement as well as the level of citizen participation help improve the quality of State policies. This is because it demonstrates a combination of local expertise and reality (Ariti et al., 2018). This shows that citizen participation plays an important and essential role in decisions regarding policy formulation and application (Callahan, 2007). This means that all citizens regardless of their educational level and abilities are respected and encouraged to participate in local development (Bishoge et al., 2019). Different participants have different perceptions of the content of policies. This will be very helpful in the process of issuing and enforcing policies. In

particular, in participatory governance, the government listens to public opinion that affects the success of policy (Gustafson and Hertting, 2016).

In the study of citizen participation, Schreurs et al., (2018) affirmed that citizen attitude towards policies have an effective effect on cooperation between citizens and governments. Therefore, participation is the most effective process for citizen to access the necessary information, get political support, and ensure the legality through laws and policies of the State (Thomas as cited in Quick and Bryson, 2016).

Many scholars have also found that citizen participation must be associated with empowerment. The concept of empowerment emphasizes self-selection, the freedom to decide the problems of participants as well as their ability to check and manage more than the resources they have (Narayan as cited in Kakumba, 2010). Based on attracting citizens to participate in State governance is an indispensable value of democratic society (Huang and Feeney, 2016; Johnson, 2015). The empowerment of citizens in solving problems will ensure citizen participation as citizen understand that they have the ability and the opportunity to decide their own problems. Empowerment also increases democracy in governance activities. In particular, empowerment will help vulnerable people in society to participate in local governance (Pandeya, 2015). The poor are the weak, those who struggle to make ends meet rather than participate in government activities. Thus, in developed countries, the involvement of the poor in government activities tends to decrease during industrialization (Devas and Grant, 2003; Holzner as cited in Nguyen et al., 2015). In developing countries, farmers in remote areas are one of the weakest groups of society. Because they have low education levels and their main jobs are mainly related to farming and livestock activities. During the rapid urbanization, they face many challenges related to the use of natural resources and living environment. This is one of the reasons why they participate in local development projects. Failure to ensure the participation of this vulnerable group in public governance will create obstacles in the local development process (Gasparre as cited in Nguyen et al., 2015). Empowerment will enable this group to promote creativity and accountability in local development activities (Chirenje et al., 2013; Brinkerhoff and Wetterberg, 2015; Lues, 2014). Therefore, participation can also be interpreted as empowering different levels of society to develop the ability to identify, decide and solve their own needs that are supported by authorities and stakeholders (Madzivhandila and Maloka, 2014). Citizen participation will help the process of governance and provision of government services more effectively (Clark and Guzman, 2017).

In short, the literature pertaining citizen participation strongly suggests that citizen participation in local governance concentrates on aspects to enabling citizens to have more

access to information of the authority and ensuring voices of citizen to be heard and received through state representative systems and stakeholders. In this study, citizen participation in local governance refers to the process by which local citizens and local authorities formulate and implement operational programs, prioritize, and conduct activities to serve the local community.

2.1.2. Forms of citizen participation in public administration

Forms and extents of citizen participation in local governance have been discussed by a great number of authors in scientific literature. There are many ways to classify citizen participation in local governance, including passive participation, participation by consultation, functional participation, and active participation (Chirenje at al., 2013; Leydet 2014) or divided by direct or indirect participation (Quick and Bryson, 2016; More, 2014). But in general, all this allows people to express their will and aspirations with state agencies in planning policies and laws as well as enforcing them. Based on the concept of community participation, including direct participation or citizen participation in issues related to local community and development interests, Madzivhandila and Maloka (2014) emphasizes that no matter what kind of participation, active citizen participation in public management plays an important role in democratic practice in current civil society. The authors' findings suggest that true participation must mean that citizens must play a central role in local governance.

Several theories have proposed indirect participation, some focusing on models of direct and deliberate participation of citizens in public administration. A number of authors who have recognized the direct participation of citizens in local governance means that people directly participate in a process of connecting people together to solve important community problems. In other words, people contribute their voices so that their ideas, needs and interests are reflected in government decisions. This contrasts with the situation where people participate indirectly in government through elected officials or stakeholders on their behalf to participate in government (Aulich, 2009; Nabatchi and Amsler, 2014).

According to the research of Callahan, he raised a number of scholars' arguments concerning the participation of citizens in public governance. Specifically, many scholars argue that direct participation is ineffective because citizens cannot be responsible for public sector decisions, and citizens are not sufficiently knowledgeable, time or motivated to ready to do it. Since then, they have supported participation through the appointment of representatives to participate in their state management is more appropriate and effective (Callahan, 2007). In another aspect, the level of citizen participation in public administration has also interested many scholars.

In a recent study of “Conflicting perceptions on participation between citizens and local government members”, Mohammadi et al., (2017) focused on the level of power sharing and power relations in this confliction through the approach of Silverman (Silverman, 2005). Specifically, in Figure 1, it is clear that the lowest level of citizen participation is related to information activities and it is governed by the power of government members. The average level of participation indicates that the appearance of a power relationship is divided between the people and the council. Finally, the highest level of citizen participation related to empowerment clearly shows the issue of citizens having full rights to participate in governance. It also means that citizens play a central role in the process of local governance.

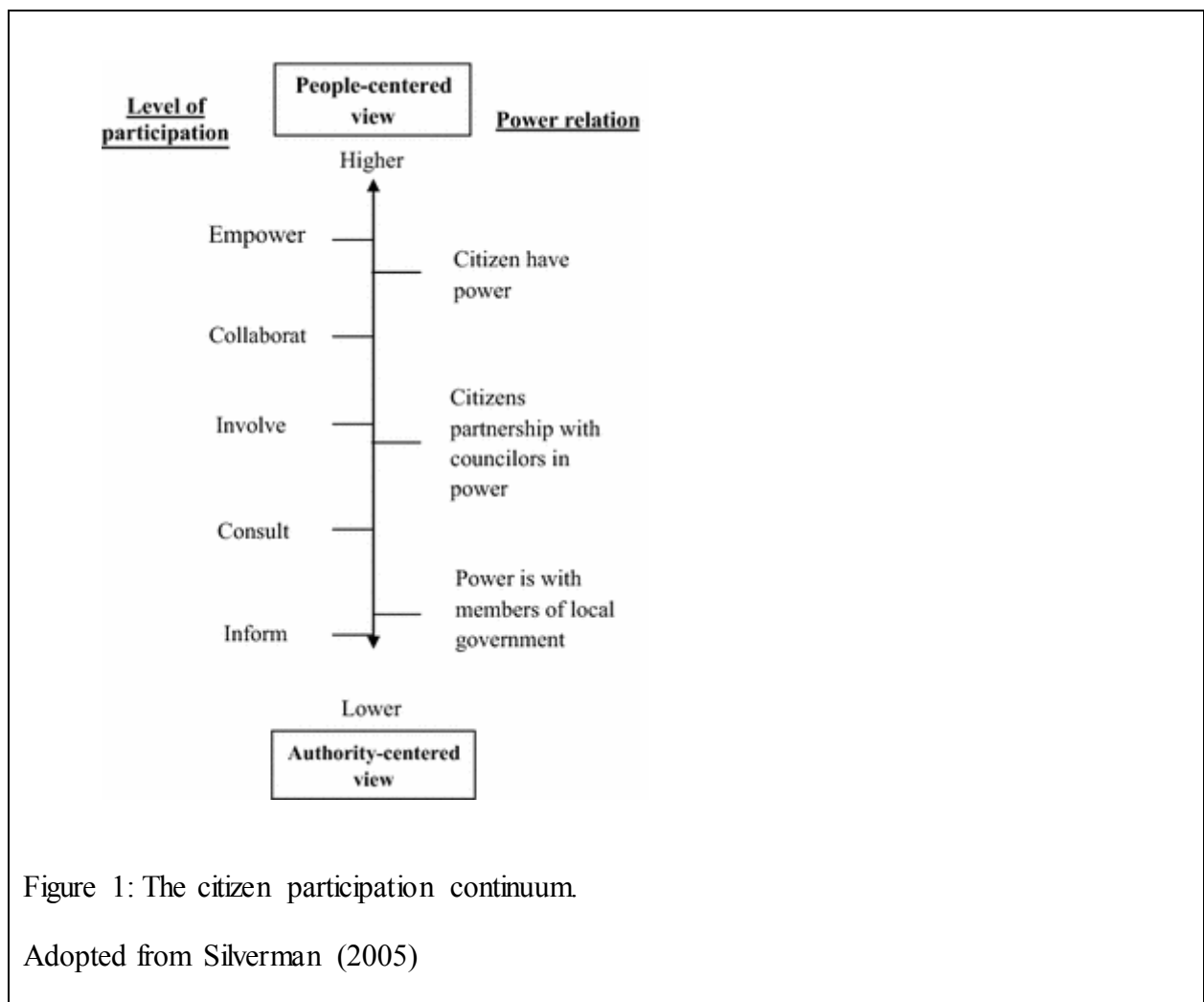


Figure 1: The citizen participation continuum.

Adopted from Silverman (2005)

2.1.3. Barriers of citizen participation

By practical research on the value of citizen participation in good governance in developing countries, Waheduzzaman (2010) has determined that the greatest barrier to citizen participation in local governance is the attitude of the stakeholders. Specifically, he found evidence that government officials and elected representatives did not attach importance to citizen participation and did not want to share information with residents. In the study of Dang

about the participation of local citizens in the development of clean water supply systems in Vietnam, researcher emphasized Oakley's view of barriers to citizen participation including returning concerns about political, administrative and social structures as well as fear and dependence on government (Dang, 2012).

With the increasing popularity of civil society, the government and stakeholders gradually recognize the importance of citizen in participating in governance. However, there are still many barriers hindering citizen participation, specifically on the nature of political institutions, the role of elected representatives, the issue of information provided to citizens, and resources such as finance, education and time factors (Chowdhury and Aktaruzzaman, 2016; Ellen Abakah, 2018). That is explained through the evidence that if political institutions encourage citizens to participate in governance, the government will create favorable conditions for people to comment and participate in the decision-making process. Additionally, the lack of interest of the representatives of the people and the unwillingness to provide information to their voters also caused controversy. This requires the government to listen and respond to citizen opinions in a timely manner to ensure effective participation (Thomas, 2013). Furthermore, many writers provide evidence that people do not have access to sufficient information before government meetings or citizen opinions are not fully acknowledged (Van Brabant, 2015). Due to the limited capacity of citizen with regard to management issues, this also has a significant impact on their limited participation in local governance (Madzivhandila and Maloka, 2014). This means that people have little or no impact on policy replacement (Mogomotsi et al., 2018). Moreover, resources related to time, financial and educational factors limit citizen willingness to participate in governance activities. That means that the shortage of human resources and costs greatly affects citizen participation in local governance (Yang and Callahan as cited in Jun and Bryer, 2016). At that time, mechanisms related to the promotion and promotion of citizen participation were also limited (Pandeya, 2015). Finally, barriers affect citizen participation in the low-income group of people (Lawton and Macaulay, 2013; Nguyen et al., 2015). This is a vulnerable group in society and they are less likely to participate due to objective reasons related to struggling to earn a living and subjective reasons related to their low educational level.

2.1.4. The participation of Vietnamese citizen

In a developing country like Vietnam, in addition to concentrating on developing the country to keep up with the progress of other countries, the State of Vietnam always appreciates citizen participation in administrative administration and consider it as a principle that is always placed high in the management system by the government.

In the state apparatus, the state authority is the agency with the most intimate relationship with the citizens, as the citizens vote the representatives to the Congress, which is a central agency ensuring representing the interests and the relationship between the State and citizen. With the function of constitutional and legislative, amending the Constitution, making laws and amending laws, the Parliament has ensured the right to participate in the state management of citizen through the regulation of public participation rights in public. This is one of the important contents in constituting the Constitution and the law. Respect for citizen participation is evident in the Constitution (including the 1946, 1959, 1980, 1992 Constitution and most recently the 2013 Constitution).

In particular, the 2013 Constitution not only affirm more deeply the role of the citizens involved in state administrative management activities but also continues to affirm assurance and promotion of citizens ownership; recognition, respect, protection and assurance of human rights and civil rights. It also aim to achieve the goal of making people richer, the country more thriving, enhance democracy, ensure fairness and implement civilization. At the same time citizens have more prosperous life, freedom, happiness. Specifically in Article 28 of the 2013 Constitution clearly stipulates the participation in state management activities, including state administrative management:

“1. Citizens have the right to participate in managing the state and society, participating in discussions and recommendations to state agencies on issues of grassroots, localities and the whole country.

2. The State creates conditions for citizen to participate in state and social management; publicity and transparency in receiving, responding to comments and suggestions of citizens”.

In addition, the government plays a role in managing and providing public services; resolving administrative disputes; inspecting and examining the activities of state administrative agencies, contributing to ensuring the right of citizens to participate in state management. Furthermore, the government also issued many legal documents on different areas to concretize the right to participate in the state management of the people. Example: Law on Election of National Assembly and People's Assembly, Law on Organization of National Assembly, Law on Government Organization, Law on Organization of People's Councils and People's Committees, Law on Promulgation of Legal Documents, Law Complaints, denunciations, Law on anti-corruption, Trade Union Law, Youth Law, Law on Fatherland Front and like. In particular, the Government promulgated Decree No. 29/1998 / ND-CP on "Regulations on implementation of Grassroots Democracy" stipulates that grassroots administrations must publicly ask for citizen

opinions and specify the jobs that citizens have local decision-making authority. This is also a form of empowering citizens.

These legal documents play an important role in ensuring citizen participation in state management on a positive and proactive basis, ensuring democracy and transparency in management. Like different countries in the world, Vietnam has two forms of citizen participation in governance, including direct participation, having the right to decide important issues of the country through referendum and the right to directly decide on many issues related to the locality, and indirect participation. The latter depends on the method of selecting representatives and on the mode of operation of those agencies (Constitution 2013).

In the study of citizen participation in public administration, Nguyen and his colleagues (2015) discovered that in the process of urbanization and expansion of cities related to infrastructure development and social stability, participation and support from citizens play a critical role. However, the participation of large city citizens in government decisions is less than in local areas. At the same time, the authors also affirmed that without the participation of citizens, the local development may generate many social problems. Therefore, for sustainable development, local authorities need to encourage and enhance citizen participation in local governance. In another study related to the rural water development project in Vietnam, Dang (2012) stated that participation of local citizens in relation to citizens is encouraged to attend meetings with government or other stakeholders as well as their contribution to labor and property (Dang, 2012). This is also a well-known viewpoint when it comes to participation, especially in relation to citizen participation in rural areas (Promoting people's participation and governance in cities through the Association of Cities of Vietnam, 2011). They can participate in the process of identifying problems, implementing and resolving these issues. Encouraging and enhancing citizen participation takes advantage of human resources in local development activities. People also have motivation and responsibility when the government respects and promotes the capabilities that citizens have.

2.2 New rural construction program

More than 30 years implementation of economic reform called the Doi Moi policy (1986), Vietnam has achieved many achievements through political consolidation, economic growth and social development. Rapid urbanization, which is the result of rural-urban migration, taking place across the country is an important factor contributing positively to the overall development of the country (Albrecht et al., 2010). In fact, although the positivity of urbanization is undeniable, rapid urbanization has brought about many urgent problems related to political stability, ensuring people living standard, environmental pollution, crime and other

problems. According to Quertamp and Miras (2012), these are the drawbacks stemming from the government's inability to fully control rapid growth in cities and regions.

A problem that has emerged over the last decade has been the fact that many cities, despite their rapid urbanization, still have a sizable portion of their area devoted to agriculture. That means, rural life still exists in urban life and needs the attention of the government in effective local governance. Therefore, the new rural construction Program was born as an important bridge for the government to bridge the gap between urban and rural areas on the basis of promoting human potential and maximizing citizen participation in solving common local problems. Before understanding the outstanding features and characteristics of the new rural construction Program in Vietnam, there is a need for an overview of the new rural construction Program in countries around the world.

In fact, many countries in the world after conducting industrialization, modernization and urbanization have implemented development strategies for agricultural support industry, taking urban support to rural development (Cheng, 2018). China is one of the typical examples. The program of building a new socialist rural area set by the Communist Party of China in 2005 with the aim to "develop production, prosperity, local civilization, neat and democratic village rural management" (Zhao et al., 2013). It is the fact that most rural residents are small-scale farmers that maintain social links with rural and agricultural sectors. The link between them and agriculture is the factor that eases employment pressure and sustains the country's agricultural economy (De Janvry and Sadoulet, 2011). The leaders of China have identified four key areas in the new rural construction program, including: the economic sector with the goal of comprehensively developing rural productivity; political field to enhance democracy so that people promote mastery according to regulations; cultural fields to enrich the spiritual and cultural life of rural residents; social field to improve the system of ensuring rural social life; and the field of rule of law to improve the knowledge and capacity of rural residents in using laws to protect their own rights and interests (Song and Li, 2012). It can be seen that since the implementation of the new rural construction policy up to now, China has achieved many great achievements in economic development and secured the trust of the resident in building the country.

Many results have been achieved in the development of the country thanks to the implementation of the new rural construction program, like the New Village Movement Saemaul Undong (New Village Movement) in Korea which has the main goal of improving income, building rural infrastructure and improving people's morale. Mike Douglass in his research on new rural development in Korea (2013) pointed out that Korean leaders act as catalysts in improving rural progress. Through the policies of the State, especially the policies related to

Saemaul Undong movement, it can be seen that the governance activities of the State have shown democracy by strengthening voluntary participation of citizens in contributing resources and labor to local development projects. Therefore, Korea has succeeded in ensuring the welfare and livelihoods of the citizens, and more importantly, mobilizing resources from the citizens in cooperating with the government to improve income, building rural infrastructure and improving the spirit of rural citizens (Heo and Kim 2016; Park, 2009). Thanks to the government's focus on agricultural development, in comparison with China and Korea, Taiwan is considered one of the successful cases of building new agriculture that is rich in creativity and competitiveness (Looney, 2012).

Implementing the policy on new rural development, the Government of Taiwan has focused on developing four factors including agricultural economy, agricultural techniques, agricultural environment and internationalization of agricultural production. In particular, the leaders of Taiwan government focused on human factors on community empowerment programs as well as strengthening participation of farmers in rural development decision making, respecting the autonomy of the rural community. In other words, the government that determines only by increasing people's self-awareness it can change their attitudes and spirit in the cause of rural development (Li, 2013). Like Taiwan, Japan has also undergone many stages in building and rebuilding new rural areas. However, in general, the Japanese government has focused on rural values, especially human, cultural and environmental values. This has contributed significantly to changing leadership thinking of the heads of government in strengthening citizen participation in government administration as well as supporting sustainable development society (Compendium of Innovative Practices in Public Governance and Administration for Sustainable Development, 2016).

In summary, it can be said that throughout the history of new rural construction in some countries around the world, with the specific elements of each country, it is easy to consider that governments are very focused on democracy and the issue of increasing citizen participation in decision making. Because rural residents are people who have a deep understanding of where they live and they have the right to know about policies, make suggestions for policies, participate in development projects and check the completion of projects, which serve themselves and the rural community.

Learning experiences from countries around the world, the Resolution of the 26th Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam on Agriculture, Farmers, and Rural Areas was promulgated in 2008, emphasizing the construction of new rural areas plays an important role in construction and distribution. With a strong legal foundation, in 2010, the

Government issued Decision No. 800 approving the National Target Program on new rural construction in the period of 2010 - 2020 through 5 contents with 19 criteria to: (Table 1)

"New rural construction has modern socio-economic infrastructure; economic structure and reasonable forms of production organization, linking agriculture with rapid development of industry and services; linking rural and urban development according to planning; democratic, stable and rich rural society with national cultural identity; protected ecological environment; security is maintained; The material and spiritual life of the people is increasingly enhanced; oriented socialist".

(Decision No. 800 of the Government)

	Criteria	Content criteria
I. Group of planning criteria		
1	Planning and implementing planning	1.1. Planning and using essential land and infrastructure for the development of agricultural production of goods, industry, handicrafts and services
		1.2. Development planning of socio-economic infrastructure-environmental standards
		1.3. Planning the development of new residential areas and embellishing existing residential areas towards civilization, preserving a good cultural identity
I. Group of criteria for socio-economic infrastructure		
2	Traffic infrastructure	2.1. The percentage of the commune and inter-commune trunk roads is asphalted or concreted according to the technical standards of the Ministry of Transport
		2.2. The ratio of village roads and hamlets is hardened according to the technical standards of the Ministry of Transport
		2.3. The ratio of kilometer of lane, clean and not muddy in the rainy season
		2.4. The ratio of the main road of the inner field is hardened and the motor vehicle is convenient to travel
3	Irrigation	3.1. Basic irrigation system meets production and people's life
		3.2. The proportion of km of canals managed by the commune is solidified
4	Electricity	4.1. Electrical system to ensure safety of the electricity industry
		4.2. Percentage of households using electricity regularly and safely from electricity sources
5	Schools	Proportion of schools at all levels: preschool, kindergarten, primary school, junior high school has material of national standards

6	Cultural facilities	6.1. The cultural house and commune sports area meet the standards of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism
		6.2. Percentage of villages having cultural houses and village sports areas meets the standards of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism
7	Rural market	The market is qualified according to the regulations of the Ministry of Construction
8	Post office	8.1. There are points for post and telecommunications
		8.2. There is Internet to the village
9	Residential housing	9.1. Temporary houses, dilapidated houses
		9.2. Percentage of households with houses meeting the standards of Ministry of Construction
III. Group criteria for economics and production organization		
10	Income	Average income per capita / year compared to the average level of the province
11	Poor households	The rate of poor households
12	Labor structure	Proportion of workers in the working age in the fields of agriculture, forestry and fishery
13	Organizational form	There are effective cooperatives or cooperatives.
IV. Group of criteria for culture - society - environment		
14	Education	14.1. Universal secondary education
		14.2. Proportion of secondary school students continuing or secondary (high school, supplementary, vocational training)
		14.3. Rate of training
15	Medical	15.1. Percentage of citizen participation in health insurance forms
		15.2. Commune health meets national standards
16	Cultural	The commune has 70% or more villages and hamlets meeting cultural village standards according to the regulations of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism
17	Environment	17.1. Percentage of people using hygienic clean water according to national standards

		17.2. Production and business establishments meet environmental standards
		17.3. There are no activities that cause environmental degradation and have green and clean environment development activities
		17.4. Cemetery is built according to planning
		17.5. Waste and wastewater are collected and treated according to regulations
V. Group of criteria for the political system		
18	Strong social and political organization system	18.1. Commune officials qualified
		18.2. There are enough organizations in the grassroots political system according to regulations
		18.3. Party committees and commune authorities meet the standard of "clean and strong"
		18.4. The political organizations of the commune all achieved advanced titles or higher
19	Social security and order	Security and social order are maintained

Table 1: 19 criteria for new rural construction Program according to Decision No. 800 of Vietnamese government.

According to Central New Rural Coordination Office, by the end of March 2019, there were 4,207 communes (accounting for 47.19%) meeting new rural standards. Thus, there is an increase of 369 communes (4.13%) compared to the end of 2018 with the average 14.61 criteria / commune. There are 66 district-level units meeting standards / completing new rural construction tasks.

It can be seen that one of the issues that need special attention in the process of implementing the National Target Program on new rural construction is to really respect and maximize the role and position of citizen in the field of politics, economy and culture. Therefore, to successfully build this program, the leaders of the country respect the principle: "People know, People discuss, People do, People monitor" for the benefit of rural people themselves (Do et al., 2016). This means that people and communities play a key role in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of local investment projects. Rural actors (rural workers, farm owners, farmers, non-governmental organizations, state and private) have the ability, conditions and qualifications

to actively participate in these decisions making on rural development policies; transparent and effective information among relevant actors; fair distribution. Localities implement the new rural construction Program to promote democracy with the spirit of high law, attaching the rules of villages and conventions to the law to regulate human behavior, ensure the legality and promote the autonomy of villages and especially maximizing grassroots Democracy Regulations.

2.3. Summary

This chapter has shown the issue of citizen participation in public governance from studies of scholars around the world, particularly from developed countries, developing countries and underdeveloped countries. From practical studies, it has been shown that civic participation plays an important role for local authorities. Evidence is that public managers have realized the need and benefits that are gained by encouraging citizen participation in solving local problems. This is demonstrated through issues related to decision-making based on citizen participation, transparency and accountability of public financial policies and activities, community development through local development projects as well as the strengthening of democracy in developing countries. Residents trust and support the government because they find that local authorities listen and facilitate them to contribute ideas, wealth and resources for local activities.

Although many scholars believe that direct or indirect participation of local citizen in local governance has a positive and negative effect on the level of participation of more or less citizens, overall, their studies contain solutions to encourage more citizen participation in local governance. In order to propose these solutions, the authors also point out barriers that negatively affect participation. Regarding the participation of Vietnamese citizens in public administration, once again the scientific literature and legal regulations have also confirmed the important role of this phenomenon. At the same time, through the experience of the New Rural construction program in the developed countries in the region, it partly shows the importance of this program. Moreover, it helps reinforce the evidence of the importance of citizen participation in local government in the new rural construction program. The next chapters of this study will contribute more evidence to clarify this issue.

Chapter 3

Theoretical framework

3.1. Theoretical approach

The theoretical framework is developed from participatory democratic theory and stakeholder approaches. These theories show that citizen participation has a positive impact on democracy, ensuring citizen participation in policy formulation and development, strengthening citizen skills and doing clearly role of stakeholders in the issue of participation in public governance. This leads to rational, general purpose decisions and increases the legitimacy of the engagement process (Michels and Graaf 2010, p. 480).

This study first based on the emerging approach (Bryson et al., 2014). The emerging approach came into being in the context that the government plays an important role in guaranteeing public values, but citizens and organizations are also increasingly showing the importance of addressing emerging issues in social life. In another aspect, while traditional public administration pays attention to efficiency, new public management views efficiency and effectiveness as standard values. However, with the continuous development of civil society, there have been many challenges that make not only the government but also organizations and citizens need to work hard to resolve. The emerging approach was born before many objective demands and arguments from scientists. Specifically, this approach again views citizens and democracy as important factors in public governance. The emerging approach emphasizes the role of democracy, which means that citizens are encouraged to participate in solving common problems. When this happens, citizens move from being voter and customer to become co-creators and co-partners (Briggs, 2008). In other words, the government carries out dialogue, contact and encouragement of citizen participation in solving problems that benefit the community. Particularly, Bryson et al. (2014) give evidence to confirm that in the Emerging Approach, elected managers and delegates can play the role of executive, collaborator and other roles to promote democracy and to attract citizens to participate in solving problems of public interest. In this respect, deliberate democracy is a form of citizen participation, and over the past decade, interest in participatory governance (for example, called co-management) has increased (Ansell and Gash, 2008; Trimble and Berkes, 2013; Johnson, 2014).

Secondly, stakeholder approach (e.g. Freeman, 2010) provided an implementation to meet the needs of stakeholders to achieve strategic goals in governance. According to stakeholder theory of Edward Freeman (2010), he holds that a company's stakeholders include just about anyone affected by the company and its working. Applying local governance, environment as an ecosystem of related groups, all of whom need to be considered and satisfied

to keep the area sustainable and successful. Citizen participation in governance can be either directly involved or indirectly involved through representatives to bring their voices and contribute ideas on issues they care about. Current treatment has been expanded on the basis of enhanced democracy. That is why citizens are considered important stakeholders in government administration. On the other hand, Bryson and his colleagues (2013) gave evidence that the methods of citizen participation in governance are different. Therefore, they believe that it is necessary to study more about how to design and implement in strengthening community participation in public governance. Thus, encouraging citizen participation in local governance will help the government achieve better governance.

Additionally, in the research of Quick and Bryson (2016) “Theories of public participation in governance”, they emphasized:

“Public participation in governance involves the direct or indirect involvement of stakeholders in decision-making about policies, plans or programs in which they have an interest”. (p.1)

First, in order for people to participate in public administration, legitimacy is one of the first issues to be guaranteed. This reflects fairness and transparency in the process of making participatory decisions and policies to ensure community benefits. At the same time, it also reflects the legitimacy of the extent to which stakeholders comply with the principles and standards of civil society (Nguyen et al., 2015). Secondly, diversity and inclusion are mentioned as important factors as citizens of different sectors will be able to participate directly or indirectly in the governance process. The variety of views, arguments, and perceptions of the participants will enrich the options in the decision-making process or the application of government policies. Thirdly, when considering the issue of citizen participation, there are many points of view on professional issues. Whether or not professional concerns of participants will have a positive or negative effect on governance. However, it must be admitted that, along with the elements of legitimacy, diversity, citizen participation will contribute much experience, many ideas in choosing the optimal decision. Through this research, Quick and Bryson (2016) affirmed research theories of citizen participation should focus on the extent and feasibility of participation; and governance should increase the opportunity for public participation in shaping public policies and implementing that policy.

3.2. Research questions

As the research objective is presented in Chapter 1, this study aims to provide new perspectives on citizen participation in local governance in Vietnam as well as explore barriers

that may affect the participation of citizen, especially in the new rural construction Program in Binh Chanh district, Ho Chi Minh City. This study therefore seeks to answer the question:

1. How is citizen participation understood in the case of new rural construction Program in Binh Chanh district, Ho Chi Minh City?
2. What are the possible barriers for citizen participation and how they could be overcome?

By analyzing the participation of citizens, their ways and levels of participation can be seen passive or proactive as well as the benefits that help them continue to participate in local governance. Additionally, this study will also explore barriers that may affect citizen participation. In particular, it could be direct barriers or indirect that can occur in this case study.

This study intends to provide recommendations related to strengthening citizen participation in local governance activities in order to provide, local authorities and policy makers a different perspective on the value of citizen participation in general governance.

This study will explore citizen participation in local governance in Binh Chanh district, one of the districts implementing the new rural construction Program. To answer the two research questions, this study focuses on case study. The in-depth interview method combined with the document analysis is conducted to find answers to research questions. The next chapter will present the methodology of this study in detail.

Chapter 4

Data and methods

With the main goal of answering research questions, this chapter will describe the methods used to collect experimental data through the case study. The researcher desires to gather useful information regarding citizen participation in local governance, existing barriers and how to enhance citizen participation in this practice. Additionally, there are some restrictions related to research design as well as ethical issues will also be presented.

4.1. Research design

4.1.1. Case study

In this study, the case study method is adopted in order to answer research questions. It is because that case studies are considered in-depth research on a specific unit in practice and are an ideal approach for empirical research (Gerring, 2004; Bass et al., 2018). According to Yin (2014), as one of the forms of social science research, case study methods are commonly used to help answer research questions related to "Why" or "How" in detailed topics. In addition, case studies provide a large amount of quality information and allow researchers to scale up research based on insight into phenomena (Polonsky and Waller, 2015). Related to phenomena in this study, the case study method helps to find evidence on how citizen participation is understood in governance as well as how citizens overcome barriers that can limit their participation in public governance.

Moreover, with a specific case study, the new rural construction Program in Bình Chánh district is chosen as the case study. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Binh Chanh is one of the districts selected to perform the new rural construction Program. This means that this program can provide real evidence of citizen participation. It is also expected to bring further understanding of the participation of citizens, and barriers that may exist and ways to overcome them.

Although the researcher was aware of and considered using quantitative methods for this study as well as considering the possibility of combining the two methods, the researcher ultimately decided to choose a qualitative research method. Thus, qualitative research method often excels in participatory studies and helps researchers to analyze in-depth phenomena close to reality. At the same time, the method also contributes to solving time constraint in this study.

First and foremost, although there are many studies related to citizen participation in countries around the world, the problems involving citizen participation in this case study as well as the barriers which may affect the participation of citizens are unclear. In particular, in the

context of the political, economic and social context, understanding these issues becomes important in this study. In-depth interviews with people from different sectors with different roles help researchers to further explore their views on citizen participation. Owning that information, the researcher will be able to answer questions about the citizen participation of local governance, in particular in the context of the new rural construction Program.

Although the barrier factors have been qualitatively determined through a few studies by scholars around the world, the researcher desires to exploit more information related to barriers, which will exist in the context of reality in Vietnam in general and the locality implementing the new rural construction program in particular. For example, factors related to information provided, people's awareness ability, convenient time can be seen in studies in countries. However, there is no guarantee that these factors will be barriers in Vietnam and there can also be other factors that exist if no qualitative survey is conducted to identify and explain these issues. Furthermore, due to the time constrains there is no possibility to conduct a large-scale survey. That is not to mention some objective difficulties related to local practices selected for research. In particular, there are a large number of immigrants in the study area that may cause some difficulties in data collection as this study focuses on the citizenry and considering the views and their perspectives on citizen participation in local governance.

Finally, according to Polonsky and Waller (2015), case study is usually based on historical and in-depth interviews. Moreover, Ellen Abakah (2018) cites Yin's study, qualitative research helps to study a contemporary phenomenon in terms of its depth and practical context. As such, in this study, there are two main data sources used. First, in-depth interviews with citizen participation, elected representatives and local authorities in Binh Chanh district were used to explore issues related to research questions (An in-depth description of this data collection method will be discussed in the next part of this chapter). Accordingly, in-depth interviews are conducted and recorded on the basis of the consent of the participants. The encrypted audio files will be cited for further analysis. Secondly, the resources are collected and analyzed to provide information related to the local political and social context in the application of case study methods.

4.1.2. In-depth interview

This study uses in-depth interview as the main tool for data collection. Interviews are based on one and one to aim at two main objectives, concluding: Firstly, to exploit the attitudes and motivations related to the research topic that may not be reflected in other methods; secondly, to help further research the topic of research in many aspects that need to be discussed to deepen the problem of discovery. Therefore, the researcher has a reason to believe that the in-

depth interview helps to identify the nature of the problem and the motive of actions related to citizen participation. According to the research of Creswell (2007), with the goal of saturating theory, research needs from 20 to 30 in-depth interviews with time from 60 minutes for each. However, with time-related limitations, in this study, the researcher interviewed 20 cases from 30 minutes to 45 minutes to clarify issues related to the topic. The interviews are recorded and then transcribed one by one to ensure the objective requirements of the interview.

4.1.3. Document analysis

In addition to in-depth interviews, to collect additional information regarding the citizen's background, context, the researcher makes the most of the analysis of documents related to the research topic. Resources are gathered from legal documents, research papers, citizen participation-related articles in public governance in Vietnam. This is the official source of information that contributes usefully in analyzing the social context, the status of research issues and can expand related issues as well as contributions to theoretical concepts and models (Polonsky and Waller, 2015).

<p>The new rural construction Program document</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Decision No. 800 / QD-TTg on approving the National Target Program on new rural construction in the period of 2010-2020. - Decision No. 1600 / QD-TTg on approving the National Target Program on new rural construction in the period of 2016-2020. - Decision No. 800 / QD-TTg on promulgating criteria of new rural districts and Regulations of provincial towns and cities to complete the task of new rural construction in the period of 2016 – 2020. - Report No. 1145 / BC-BCĐ on the results of implementing the new rural construction Program in 2018 and the orientation and tasks of 2019 in Binh Chanh district. - Summary Report on 10 years of implementation of the National target Program on new rural construction in Binh Chanh district, period 2010 - 2020
<p>Citizen participation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decision 217-QD / TW on the Regulation on social supervision and criticism of the Vietnam Fatherland Front and political-social organizations. -Decision 218-QD / TW on Regulations on the Vietnam Fatherland Front, political and social organizations and people participating in constructing the Party and government building.

	<p>-Ordinance No. 34 on implementing democracy in communes, wards and towns is a legal document passed by the Standing Committee of the National Assembly of Vietnam on April 20, 2007.</p> <p>- Vietnamese Constitution 2013</p>
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Table 2: List of documents reviewed

4.2 Data collection

4.2.1. Participant selection

Due to funding constraints and time constraints, 20 persons were invited to participate as the main information providers for this study. Random sampling of participants was chosen to help facilitate information gathering. The researcher chose to participate directly in neighborhood meetings and meetings between people and elected representatives to reach the informants. Additionally, to ensure the objective reason of the study, the researcher also approached some people in the population area who were willing to provide information for the study.

Information provider criteria include:

- Local citizens: those who live and grow up locally.
- Elected representatives: those who are elected by the people by ballot to represent the will and aspirations of the people in local issues.
- Authority: local officials

ID Code	Age	Gender	Education	Current occupation	Years of working in the position
Interviewee 1	53	Male	Bachelor	Public manager	20
Interviewee 2	38	Female	Master	Public manager	15
Interviewee 3	30	Male	Master	Elected representatives	7
Interviewee 4	41	Female	Bachelor	Elected representatives	15
Interviewee 5	40	Male	Bachelor	Elected representatives	16
Interviewee 6	35	Female	Master	Elected representatives	12
Interviewee 7	62	Male	Bachelor	Retired (formerly a civil servant)	2
Interviewee 8	71	Male	High school graduated level	Accommodation business	20
Interviewee 9	29	Female	Bachelor	Agricultural engineer	6
Interviewee 10	43	Male	Bachelor	Art director	13

Interviewee 11	80	Male	Secondary school graduate level	Farmer	40
Interviewee 12	48	Female	High school graduated level	Accommodation business	20
Interviewee 13	25	Male	Bachelor	Teacher	3
Interviewee 14	31	Female	Bachelor	Officer	9
Interviewee 15	37	Female	Master	Teacher	13
Interviewee 16	55	Female	High school graduated level	Taylor	30

Table 3: Characteristics of participants

The reason the researcher selects those who provide information according to the above criteria is because the researcher wants to explore the different views between the parties regarding the issue of citizen participation, barriers as well as the ways they will perform to overcome those barriers. This is considered quite interesting in this study, because of it, the researcher will have a more objective view of citizen participation in local governance.

It is noticed that small sample sizes cannot reflect the whole population. However, the researcher has a belief that with diverse information, which comes from many different objects will contribute usefully to the topic of research, namely to show different views about the how is citizen participation in local governance expressed (Dang, 2012). Thus, 14 informants out of 20 are local citizen, four participants are elected representatives and two participants are local officials. These are also participants who provided information regarding barriers and appropriate ways to overcome those barriers. In addition, the balance between the number of men and women in this study also helps ensure equality in research issues.

As the result of the initial contact of the researcher, 20 persons accepted the interview invitation. Therefore, the researcher arranged the schedule and received interview consent from the participants. However, in the course of the study, there were 4 problematic cases. To be more precise, 2 persons withdrew for personal reasons. There was also one case where the researcher contacted by phone several times to make an appointment for an interview, but the participant did not respond. In one case, the participant rescheduled the researcher to schedule an interview after July 2019. For this case, the interviewer took notes and divided them into two cases: If after coding, the collected information analysis would ensure the necessary data for this study, the researcher did not interview this case further. If the researcher wants more information, this case will be interviewed after July 2019. However, due to the pressure on the time of the study, the researcher studied the former, which means not interviewing this case to facilitate the completion

of the steps in this study. This is reinforced by research by Flick (2013) that in qualitative research, data analysis can reduce large data into core data or expand small sources of information by further solving problems.

4.2.2. Semi-structured interviews

Preparation

The researcher performed a semi-structured interview to collect data according to suggested factors from the literature. The advantage of this method is to help the researcher discover a specific phenomenon based on the maximum collection of information on the topic being studied. With this approach will encourage participants to share more of their own insights in various issues as well as diversity in information content (Saunders et al., 2009). The researcher developed the list of open-ended questions to interview the selected people. This list was presented by the researcher to the instructor to receive comments from them. After receiving feedback from supervisor, the researcher conducted a pilot interview with a local resident to ensure the interview questions collected the necessary information.

The interview outline consists of 4 main parts. The introduction is the warm-up questions to gather information about gender, age, education level, occupation, number of years of work, the main task that the interviewee is undertaking. At the same time, the researcher also dedicated a question regarding the understanding of interviewees about the goals, meanings, achievements and limitations of the new rural construction Program. Key questions are opened with an understanding of interviewees about citizen participation and related issues. The second part is a question regarding barriers that may affect citizen participation. Finally, the researcher also raised questions to explore how interviewees overcome barriers to contribute to future citizen participation.

In these sections, the researcher also offers options that derive from the evaluation of documents in Chapter 2. However, the researcher did not give them out immediately at the interview but instead encouraged interviewees to identify and give their own opinions. Only when interviewees find it difficult to provide answers, the new researcher offers these options to learn their point of view through questions such as: "It is argued that..."; "There are many views that...";... The researcher also did not forget to put an end question to interviewees to contribute other content that the study did not cover. One important thing that the researcher has always focused on is the information about the purpose of the research and the responsibility of the interviewee when they agree to participate, the time of the interview, permission to record the answer. In particular, the most important is the commitment to ensuring the confidentiality of personal information. This means that the opinions of their respondents to ensure there are no

disadvantages that occur to them after the interview. Information sheet for interviewees is in Appendix 1. To ensure the quality of the interviews, the researcher has developed an interview procedure. Specifically, the researcher participates in neighborhood meetings and meetings between people and elected representatives. In addition, the interviewer also approached some cases in the residential area. After approaching the informants, the interview schedule was unified based on favorable criteria for both interviewers and interview participants. The researcher conducted 16 interviews in June 2019. The interviews last from 30 minutes to 45 minutes, this is enough time for the information provider to express their views regarding this research issue.

During the interview

The interviews were carried out at the homes of the participants. This was very convenient to help researchers interact fully and deeply exploit the detailed information from interviewees. Because Vietnamese is the main language in all researchers' interviews, this is very convenient for interviewees to understand and answer most of the mentioned content. This also helped the researcher to maximize the information for the study although it took a long time to transcribe the answers according to the interviewed content.

During the interview, the researcher also encouraged participants to further share their perspectives on the topic by suggesting the arguments that were found in the literature review. At the same time, the researcher also uses a pause and silence technique for a short period of time so that participants try to share all the knowledge and especially give reasons to explain their answers (Truong, 2017).

As mentioned in the previous part, before the end of the interview, the researcher asked participants about making additional contributions to the topic to ensure the objectivity of the study. Additionally, the researcher then thanked the participants for taking the time to provide valuable information for this study. Finally, the researcher also did not forget to record contact information to facilitate further exchange when a case arises after the interview.

After the interview

After each interview, the researcher quickly transcribed the content of the interview words by words. This has helped researchers limit errors when transcribing at the same time the content of many interviews is different. In addition, during the transcribing process, if the information is not clear, the interviewer will contact the participant again through the phone number that was previously recorded. As a result, the researcher can confirm or clarify the views of participants about the content of the answer.

4.3. Limitations and potential problems

The qualitative approach is the main method used for this study. Participants are free to express their views on research issues, therefore, it is difficult to avoid biases or respond to expectations of society. Understanding this problem, the researcher tried to rely on the attitudes and feelings of participants to exploit more potential information.

A clear limitation of the data collection method in this study is the language barrier. This is called a barrier because both researchers and respondents use Vietnamese - mother tongue to interact, while this study is presented in English. Therefore, although using Vietnamese brings comfort in the interview and participants also share many deeper ideas, the translation, however, challenges can affect the findings of this study. To solve this problem, after each interview the researcher quickly turned the answer into English to prevent possible mistakes when handling multiple tapes at the same time.

Another limitation identified is that the research results are small sample sizes that cannot be generalized. However, the aim of the study is to focus more deeply on the phenomenon of citizen participation in local governance in a specific case rather than reflecting the overall research on this issue. The number of cases of interviews for this study is relatively appropriate. Therefore, the researcher can exploit information that involves citizen participation to answer research questions. However, it would be better if the expanded sample size will definitely reinforce the findings of this study.

4.4. Data analysis

Data analysis plays a critical role in qualitative research and appears only when all steps on data collection and processing are completed. This is because no matter how the data is, the main analytical researcher is directed at the findings or outcomes of the study (Flick, 2013). In the in-depth study of data analysis, Uwe Flick (2013) also affirmed that:

“Qualitative data analysis is the classification and interpretation of linguistic (or visual) material to make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making in the material and what is represented in it. Meaning-making can refer to subjective or social meanings. Qualitative data analysis also is applied to discover and describe issues in the field or structures and processes in routines and practices. Often, qualitative data analysis combines approaches of a rough analysis of the material (overviews, condensation, summaries) with approaches of a detailed analysis (elaboration of categories, hermeneutic interpretations or identified structures). The final aim is often to arrive at generalizable statements by comparing various materials or various texts or several cases”. (p.5)

With the importance of data analysis, the researcher conducted a process of organizing and encrypting the collected data to ensure adequate preparation for the presentation of research results. Because of the nature, the process of data collection, data analysis and development, solving research problems is a system of processes that interact with each other (Saunders et al., 2009). First, through the data collected from in-depth interviews, the researcher divided them into groups of related information based on the similarities and differences of the sources of information collected and available. This step has helped the researcher better understand the different characteristics, the interaction between the answers as well as the meaning of that interaction in the context. After the list of essential data is ready, the researcher can compare and integrate those relationships to formulate the theory for the study. In addition, during the analysis process, the researcher can easily discover noticeable or novel details, which are useful contributions to research results as well as future research proposals.

In this study, after obtaining data from in-depth interviews. The researcher proceeded to listen again and transcribed all the data according to the questions in interview outline. This is an important step for researchers to review the content and quality of answers. The researcher then compared the answers arranged in the order above to find similarities and differences, and discovered the new findings that the literature review has not mentioned (Weber, 1990; Hans, 1989). This means that the researcher will analyze the content when interpreting data. Content analysis method gives researchers the flexibility to examine the underlying content as well as the deeper implications of research issues (Duriau et al., 2007; Wang, 2011). In fact, the identification of new findings was noted by the researcher at the time of the interview. It is convenient for researchers to exploit more information from participants. Because these findings are likely to show differences in the study content compared to other studies, the researcher focuses on exploiting more information to discuss further in the discussion of research results. Moreover, similarities or differences will be the basis for researchers to conduct statistics of research results. It is easy for the researcher to know the number of respondents with similar views or different views from the rest. To encrypt data, researchers use In vivo coding method. This is a method of analyzing qualitative data by using actual words of interviewees to highlight their opinions and voices (Manning, 2017; Saldaña, 2016). Each interview is coded and organized by the researcher in order to analyze and compare the content.

In addition, secondary data with official sources of information from the government and local authorities help the researcher navigate the content and research issues. The analysis of these secondary data sources is also the foundation for the researcher to learn more about the issues that need to be discussed with participants in the interview about issues related to research

objectives. In addition, filtering information from these sources can help researchers have more arguments to discuss in the discussion of research results.

4.5. Ethical Issues

Research ethics is always a concern in building research, theoretical approaches, data collection, processing, and analysis to clarify research objectives and questions (Saunders et al., 2009). Research ethics may relate to the subject and object research, it needs to be ensured to limit violations of behavioral standards and ethical norms in the course of research (Polonsky and Waller, 2015). Therefore, identifying ethical issues will help researchers minimize inappropriate behaviors and help improve the quality of research.

4.4.1. Voluntary participation and informed consent

Potential candidates may agree or refuse to participate in answering questions that no one can intervene in this process (Polonsky and Waller, 2015). This means that the researcher cannot force or attempt to pressure an individual to participate in the study. In addition, to get the consent of participant, the researcher must make sure that the potential candidate understands all the requirements of the interview and the problems that may arise. Considering this issue, in this study, the researcher ensured that all participants were informed in Vietnamese about the topics related to the title, researcher information, research objectives, role of participants and the use of research results. In addition, with this study, the researcher also asked for the right to record from the participants before the interview began. In any case, the recording disclaimer is respected.

4.4.2. Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality and Anonymity are an important aspect of research ethics. This issue was presented by the researcher before the interviews began. That means even though the researcher knows all the interviewees, any information that affects the disclosure of information about the interviewees will not exist in the results report. In coding data, research the names of participant as "Interviewee 1", "Interviewee 2", etc., instead of their full name. This not only makes it more complicated to present data but also ensures anonymity of the information provider.

4.4.3. Audio-taping

In this study, the researcher used a tape recorder to record the interview. This was presented to the participant before the interview was conducted. Recording the interview ensures that the researcher does not miss any important information, especially allowing the interviewer to understand the opinion of the respondent based on intonation in the words. In all cases, respondents have the right to ask the researchers to suspend or not to record sensitive answers

that they think may affect them (Polonsky and Waller, 2015). Evidently, after the data has been transcribed completely, all tapes will be deleted to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the information provider.

4.4.4. The role of researcher

The role of the researcher is also one of the ethical issues that needs to be considered in both qualitative and quantitative research. Due to the ethical issues that appear almost in all the process of conducting research, the role of the researcher in ensuring ethical issues is related to the own biases and subjective. In other words, the researcher puts the research issues under objective phenomena. This means that although the researcher is a civil servant, it does not therefore impose a personal view on the truth obtained from research data. Even, the researcher used in vivo coding to be able to use the participants' own phrases, thereby ensuring objectivity and ensuring answers to research questions in accordance with reality.

4.6. Summary

With a qualitative research approach, this chapter portrays the research methods chosen for this study. The researcher uses case study to find answers to research questions related to citizen participation in local governance through the new rural construction Program. Some issues related to data access, data collection, processing and analysis as well as research ethics issues are also clarified in this chapter. From the foundation of the previous chapters, the next chapter will present the main findings through in-depth analysis of the data.

Chapter 5:

Findings

5.1. Local context

This section provides some general information about Binh Chanh district, Ho Chi Minh City, in which this study is conducted to explore and exploit issues related to citizen participation. In this section, the local context, specifically in the new rural construction Program, is depicted more clearly as a basis for interpreting the research results that are presented immediately.

5.1.1. Overview about Binh Chánh district

Overview about Binh Chánh district
Area: 25.255,99 hectares
Population: 686837 (in 2019)
Administrative divisions:
• 16 communes: An Phu Tay, Binh Chanh, Binh Hung, Binh Loi, Da Phuoc, Hung Long, Le Minh Xuan, Pham Van Hai, Phong Phu, Qui Duc, Tan Kien, Tân Nhut, Tan Quy Tay, Tan Tuc, Vinh Loc A, Vinh Loc B.
• 106 hamlets - neighborhoods
Ethnic groups: Kinh, Hoa, Khmer, Cham

Figure 2: The information about Binh Chanh district

Binh Chanh district is an important gateway connecting Ho Chi Minh City and the Western provinces. Moreover, Binh Chanh district is also assessed by the government as an economic center with industrial production, handicraft, commerce, service, traffic hubs and technical infrastructure hubs in the West - Southwest City. At the same time, with the formation of new residential areas in combination with existing residential areas, Binh Chanh is supporting Ho Chi Minh City to reduce population pressure as well as helping the locality step by step urbanize rural areas. Rapid urbanization creates favorable conditions for citizens from provinces to migrate to Binh Chanh district to seek career development opportunities.

However, with a relatively large area, the development among regions is uneven. In many remote communes, people's lives still feature the traditional agricultural areas. The change in the face of the countryside began when Binh Chanh was one of five suburban districts of Ho Chi Minh City supported by the implementation of the new rural construction Program. This program aims to help Binh Chanh district have enough capital to build and complete infrastructure, improve income and life for rural citizens. This is also a turning point for Binh Chanh district to build a strong government through the cooperation of the government and citizens in state administration.

5.1.2. The new rural construction Program in Binh Chanh district

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the new rural construction Program from countries around the world to Vietnam has the main goal of supporting rural areas to use available resources for local development. Since the new rural construction Program applied in Binh Chanh district (2010), Binh Chanh district has been allocated 4.604 billion VND to complete and put into use 471 projects (Report 590 of Steering Committee of new rural construction Program oin Binh Chanh district on Summary of 10 years of implementation of the National target on new rural construction Program in Binh Chanh district, period 2010-2020). These are works on electricity, transportation, schools, clinics, irrigation and the like. In particular, local authorities have promoted the participation of citizens in each project, each local development project. Therefore, citizens understand and actively participate in the program as well as recognize the program as a tool to help them show their rights and obligations in participating in local development.

Although the participants have do not remember all the 19 criteria of the new rural construction Program, most of them were aware of the common goal of the new rural construction Program. The results indicate that many of the participants know about the goal of the new rural construction Program through local radio. The other persons know about the program through neighborhood meetings and meetings with elected representatives.

“I don't know all the criteria of the program. Before listening to the Radio Station every day about the new rural construction Program, I was curious to find out and now it became familiar to me and my family. This program, I see, has improved people's living standard and boosted local economic development.”
(Interviewee 14)

“Since the introduction of the new rural construction Program, I have been regularly mobilized by the government to contribute ideas on road construction and bridge construction. I see the government becoming increasingly interested in the opinion of citizen”. (Interviewee 11)

The elected representatives and local officials have a more specific view of the new rural construction Program. They have considered that this is a tremendous government program with two main phases, including building and upgrading the criteria for the new rural construction. Moreover, they also affirmed that new rural construction contributes to narrowing the gap between urban and rural areas.

“I think the new rural construction program aims to bridge the gap between urban and rural areas, and thereby improve the quality of life of the people. Roads that were narrow and muddy were replaced by asphalt roads and pine roads. These are constructions that show the consensus of the people and the government”.

(Interviewee 3)

“New rural construction Program is aimed at beneficiaries who are resident. Therefore, they must be concerned, must be satisfied with the works and policies that the state has implemented. When there is a consensus of the people, any work will be successful, not just the new rural construction Program”. *(Interviewee 12)*

Many achievements have been reaped from the rational decisions of the new rural construction Program, however, there are also many shortcomings related to the implementation of criteria in this program. Numerous respondents stated that there are many criteria that still follow the target, not really sustainable as the real purpose that the program requires.

“Improved rural infrastructure is what I saw first, but employment for rural workers is still lacking. Local people mostly work in agriculture, they need the government to pay more attention to job creation when urbanization is increasing”.

(Interviewee 16)

Similarly, from *Interviewee 15* response, it is found that environmental pollution issues adversely affect people's live.

“Many people are still not aware of environmental hygiene. They still keep the habit of leaving garbage in a convenient place with them without caring about the consequences for others. The factories also discharged waste into the environment, I also commented to the authorities but it seems to be ineffective”. *(Interviewee 15)*

5.2. The citizen participation in Vietnam

This section details the analysis of interviews related to research questions. Three main contents related to how people understand the participation, barriers to participation and how citizen overcome those barriers will be clarified through this section. The answers of the interviewees will be arranged conveniently for analysis, because the researcher found there is overlap between the answers in the same analytical unit.

5.2.1. Perspectives on citizen participation

The main objective of this research is to study the phenomenon of citizen participation in local governance in Vietnam; how participation is understood by local citizens and how it is shown. This is important information in order to better understand the barriers and how to overcome those barriers. To answer the question of how citizen participation is understood, the respondents were asked about how they described their participation locally. When asked about citizen participation in local governance, most interviewees had difficulties with the answer. That means that they recognize that citizen participation is simply the participation of citizens in voluntary activities, local social activities. Therefore, the researcher suggested a more specific question concerning describing participation in their own thinking as well as asking them to describe the activities they once participated in local governance. The results show that voting in elections is an activity addressed by the majority of respondents. Among all respondents on this activity, it became obvious that voting is their direct participation in state governance. Even Interviewee 8 shared that he used to be a candidate for the local People's Assembly election.

“4 years ago, I participated in the election of commune People's Assembly candidates. I understand that this is the rights and obligations of the citizen in state governance. Each person has a vote to elect the delegates to represent the will and aspirations of citizen. In other words, these delegates on behalf of the citizen participate in local governance activities”. (Interviewee 5)

If the voting activity is perceived by most respondents as the direct participation of the people in governance, indirect participation has many aspects that the interviewees mentioned. Specifically, majority of the interviewees believed that citizen participation is the citizen opinion in meetings with local authorities regarding policy and project decisions.

“Participation is the fact that people have information about projects, policies or government activities so that they can comment on these activities. Because these are activities that directly affect people's lives, they must know to participate in comments. That is the right and responsibility of the people”. (Interviewee 7)

It is similar in the case of Interviewee 8. He stated that citizen participate because they have sense of civic responsibility to participate in state administration.

“Anything happening locally, we want to be informed by the government. In that way, we can discuss together and assess whether government activities are as in the policy mentioned”.

These respondents also understood the form of direct participation and indirect participation. This is demonstrated by emphasizing the role of elected representatives in representing voice of citizens in meetings with local authorities.

“Citizens have the right to vote according to the Constitution. We elected representatives for us to participate in local state management activities. Therefore, elected representatives are responsible for receiving comments from local people to report to the authorities for settlement. At the same time they must be accountable so that we know how well these events are resolved”. (Interviewee 10)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, among the respondents to this study, many were elected representatives and local government officials. This is a reason why awareness of citizen participation in public administration also has some differences.

“With the role of elected representative, I realized that people implemented the maximization of the slogan "People know, people discuss, people do, people check ". This means that local residents understand the content they want to know and need to contribute; they actively discussed with local people, elected representatives and public authorities; they also actively contribute labors and money to implement the project locally, which community can benefit from this; finally, they can monitor activities, this constructions are about quality to get feedback to authorities when something goes wrong. In addition, through the opinion of the citizen, the State agencies will consider the priority when implementing programs and projects based on the selection of programs to meet the needs of the people”. (Interviewee 3)

Similarly, Interviewee 1 emphasizes democracy in the participation of resident:

“Mentioning citizen participation in local management refers to democracy. The authorities wants all issues of planning and publicizing the plan of socio-economic development, in general, the issues of local management that all people know and have comments on these issues. Especially the activities related to investment in the community, the government organized meetings with the people to listen to people's opinions on how the project work; how to affect citizen; how the budget contributedall must have the participation of the citizens”.

On the other side, participation is also understood as the contribution of residents' physical activities and property resources to local activities that have occurred four times during the information gathering process. Regarding to this perspective, participation is limited to the implementation of decisions, plans, goals, and activities that were built by the government or other officials.

“I think the participation of citizens is the work that people contribute money and labor power when the State advocates to mobilize people to help perform public works. Each person who contributes a bit will help the project be done faster”.
(Interviewee 13)

“I participated in the local security self-management team to help the government stabilize the area of regional security. In addition to the main management role of the government, I think security groups also play an important role in propagating and mobilizing resident to actively participate in denouncing criminals as well as preventing crimes in each family”. (Interviewee 9)

Although, understanding citizen participation is simply a contribution of funds, labor, it is found that the respondents are also aware that when they have contributed funds, they are responsible for considering how the funding is made. For example, an interviewee donated 500m² of land to make public roads, he affirmed that:

“I contribute material to making roads according to the policy of the State. When the work was done, I was often there to observe whether or not the implementing unit works according to the construction information. Because, I think I contribute by private funding into the general budget and I want the project to be commensurate with the funds invested by the State. Many fund contributors like me also regularly monitor the speed of construction”.

In addition, there are two points of view that show that citizen participation is empowered in making final decisions. They emphasize that empowerment is because they are aware that in addition to contributing ideas and discussing local issues, citizens need to be empowered in making final decisions. Then the government must respect and commit to making that decision. As a results, it also entailed the responsibility of local management of citizens and authorities.

“I think residents need to be assured of the right to decide after making a comment, discussing with the government. For example, a neighborhood is flooded frequently because the road surface is too low. Citizens in the neighborhood will propose ideas and discuss with the government to upgrade the route, and the people themselves are the participants of the vote to decide whether to make this route. The government will follow this final decision of the public. In other words, regardless of the form of implementation, the local residents always choose appropriate methods to implement”. (Interviewee 16)

The remaining opinion focuses on the quality of governance when citizens are empowered. He believed:

“Empowerment will help the government to promote the role of residents in participating in solving community problems. In other words, the government cannot have enough human resources to know and solve all the problems that occur in the locality. Having empowerment means that citizens will be more responsible for local

issues. As a result, they found their opinions respected and ensured by the government. In the long term, this will help the locality improve its governance with the increasing citizen participation". (Interviewee 7)

Moreover, the local official shared the view of citizen participation in local governance based on citizen right to participate in state management.

"Firstly, if citizen are qualified, trusted and elected to agencies such as the National Assembly and People's Assembly, they have the right to consider and decide important issues. In addition, they also have the right to supervise the activities of State agencies. Secondly, people are qualified and undergo recruitment examinations to become officials, civil servants and officials, at this time they will directly use state power to monitor unit activity, they are working". (Interviewee 2)

Although there are different views on participation, most respondents state that citizen participation in government administration activities has a positive meaning. This is reflected in the agreement of respondents in affirming that citizen participation expresses their rights and responsibilities in state management. At the same time, participation also helps to enhance democracy, publicity and transparency of state agencies.

"The increasing citizen participation shows that the proximity between government and people is increasing. The government creates conditions for citizen to participate, which indicates that the government is interested in the opinions and perceptions of citizen in the local issue. Residents who are involved in government activities show that they gradually understand their roles and rights in local development". (Interviewee 4)

During the study, the researcher also found that quite many stated that they participated in local management through indirect participation in political-social organizations. In particular, the respondents stated that when they were members of these organizations, they were able to criticize the policies and laws of the State as well as supervise the activities of State agencies and local officials.

"Although retiring but I am still a member of the Commune Veterans Association, I feel that my ideas and aspirations about local activities are solved faster when I propose to the Veterans Association. Therefore, I believe that citizen participation in local decisions will maximize when people join a socio-political organization". (Interviewee 8)

In short, the results showed that most of the interviewees were aware of the participation of local citizens in local governance through voting activities and contributing comments related to solve local problems; activities related to the inspection and supervision of programs and

investment projects in the locality; participation in social organizations and even activities to contribute funds and labor to implement these programs and constructions. With positive views on citizen participation in local governance activities, the study results also show that most of the respondents confirmed that citizen participation increased, especially in the new rural construction Program taking place in Binh Chanh district.

“The participation of people has increased in the past years because the local authorities increasingly attach importance to the civic opinions in making decisions related to local development”. (Interviewee 13)

“Locals participate more and more in the activities of the State, especially since the new rural construction Program was born. That is because locals have easy access to local development related information, as well as information related to policies affecting them. Therefore, they can contribute ideas and reflect the problems that arise during the local construction process”. (Interviewee 10)

Understanding and awareness of citizen rights and responsibilities in local governance are also an important factor that increases citizen participation.

“In general, participation of citizen in recent years has increased in both quantity and quality. Locals understand more about the right to participate in local management activities. Therefore, they voluntarily participate in activities that are more directly related to the community than before when they only participate passively”. (Interviewee 4)

There are many benefits achieved when people participate in local government activities. This is also the motivation for participation to increase in recent years.

“All activities of the local government are more or less affecting people and the community. Especially the new rural construction program brings many benefits directly related to people's lives. Therefore, any information related to policies and policies that affect the locality, locals have the opportunity to provide comments so that the community can benefit from the final decisions”. (Interviewee 5)

Similarly, according to the views of elected representatives, local officials also stated that citizen participation tended to increase.

“As a public servant, I consider citizen participation increasing. That is explained by the rise of democracy in society. The government has made public and transparent programs and policies, and it is not difficult for people to monitor and evaluate government activities. Citizens are now different from the previous generation, they know the right to participate in state management through elected

representatives so they often contribute ideas and require explanation from representatives". (Interviewee 1)

In this case, when suggested by the researcher on the issue of participation in comments, participation in monitoring activities of state agencies and officials, local officials said that such participation is increasing:

"The government must be under the supervision of the people in decisions related to local development. That means locals have to be informed about the policies and local development plans. At the same time, the government is accountable for people to understand and participate in comments and supervision". (Interviewee 2)

However, the term "reduced" in the issue of citizen participation appears 4 times. Participants mentioned many reasons to explain their answers. Specifically, they stated that citizen participation in local governance has decreased over the years because: firstly, lack of accountability in addressing public comments regarding issues local threads.

"The people who participated in constructing the government were getting better and better, but in return the authorities did not listen to opinions of locals. This leads to information that is not specific to the locals, even ignoring the information of the final decision to the locals". (Interviewee 15)

Secondly, neighborhood group meeting, referendum meetings have not been properly organized. In other words, they are mostly formal rather than effective.

"Public opinion meetings are organized in a very informal way. Residents are informed of policies from non-professional individuals. Therefore, I find myself learning this information rather than attending meaningless meetings". (Interviewee 14)

Thirdly, many citizens are indifferent to the activities they can participate in to help the locality grow. That means that many locals still think that if the problem is not related to them, they do not need to contribute comments.\.

"I see many cases still indifferent to local activities. Specifically, many families do not connect with the locality, do not participate in any local meetings. Many people, many ideas will help the locality solve the difficulties, so when many people neglect these activities will reduce the dynamism and creativity in the final decisions". (Interviewee 6)

Finally, those who consider participation to contribute funds and labor to local development projects believe that citizen participation has tended to decrease in recent years. That was explained by them:

“The new rural construction Program has been going on for many years so the projects have been invested almost completely. Therefore, I think locals will reduce the contribution of funds and labor to join the government in implementing projects”. (Interviewee 7)

5.2.2. Barriers affecting citizen participation

As stated in the literature review, barriers are factors that hinder citizen participation in local governance. There are different types of barriers, in this study, the researcher has discovered the barriers that are emerging in a developing country, Vietnam. The data collected showed that all respondents said that the biggest barrier to their participation was the lack of information. The lack of information is understood as the fact that local officials or elected representatives do not want to share information relating to the implementation of State decisions and policies to citizens. Citizens realized that the lack of information caused many negative problems.

“Information contributes to helping citizen understand policies and programs that benefit the community and the locality. Therefore, the lack of information makes people unable to identify existing local problems or issues that are supporting local development. Locals do not know, they cannot contribute ideas and cannot monitor government activities”. (Interviewee 7)

Barriers related to information can cause a loss of a confidence of citizens in local governments. That is explained by the lack of transparency of the government causing citizens doubts about governance.

“Participating in the new rural construction Program not only contributes to local construction but also brings benefits to myself and my family, so I do not have to face any barriers. However, if there is a barrier, there is a lack of publicity and transparency in public projects. This loses locals confidence in government decisions”. (Interviewee 12)

It is similar to Interviewee 16. She expressed her concern with the lack of information of citizens:

“All policies, programs and investment projects are not clear. I think this information is provided sketchily, not even provided. Therefore, people do not know how to discuss and contribute ideas. As a result, people have no basis to monitor the effectiveness in implementing these activities. Cannot join without information”.

Agreeing with this view, an elected representative also stated that there were many problems in deploying information to citizen. This leads to a lack of information that citizens are facing.

“Currently, the implementation of information to people is not really good. There are policies that need to be widely disseminated to the community in the most specific way, but this is being interrupted by unequal propaganda among regions, localities, even within the same commune. Therefore, there are still locals who have not grasped the information because of this reason”. (Interviewee 4)

Due to the nature of the work, many citizens have difficulty accessing local information. However, the indifference of local officials and elected representatives in providing information to these citizens also contributed to the lack of information that led to restrictions on citizen participation in local governance.

“Information does not go to the people. Many people have easy access to local information, but there are also some people who are unable to access information. If the local authorities do not provide specific local information, it is difficult for these people to know and contribute to the government. In addition, when participating in neighborhood meetings or meetings with elected representatives, there is not much time for people to know all local information to contribute ideas”. (Interviewee 3)

The lack of responsibility of local authorities also contributes to creating information barriers that make citizen participation difficult. That is explained by the many neighborhood meetings, citizen meetings and the like, without the presence of local officials, or elected representatives.

“Local information, policies and programs for socio-economic development are very important for locals to know to give their opinions or support when not reasonable. Yet the competent and professional people do not participate. This task is delegated to the team leader who cannot answer specific questions or explanations to locals. Locals do not understand, even misunderstanding the problem due to lack of official information, it is easy to create negative public opinion in the population area”. (Interviewee 8)

The interview data shows the ability of the citizen, such as the level of understanding of the law, the rights, obligations and education levels and the like as well are one of the barriers affecting citizen participation in local governance. As mentioned above, many citizens only understand that participation is the contribution of funds and labor power when the State mobilizes human and property resources for activities related to construction of works or implementing local development programs. Because of this awareness, many citizens have not

participated in activities to contribute ideas to decisions regarding policies, plans or monitoring of civil servants and government in local governance.

“I know the government mobilizes funding to make a transportation route somewhere in the locality, I donate money to support and do not need to contribute ideas. I myself do not know about planning and construction, so I do not care much about project information. As long as the route is completed later, I will come to observe the results that the government and people work together”. (Interviewee 12)

“Even though I participated in the project under the slogan “The State and the people work together”, I only participated in contributing labor as neighbors. I also do not pay much attention to the design and technical standards, because that is the task of the government and the construction unit. We have just done and observed whether or not they use the right materials”. (Interviewee 15)

Similarly, Interviewee 11 emphasize to monitoring problem. He stated that:

“It is hard to ask us for advice or supervision now. The policy issued by the Central Government, I think it is fine, local authority and citizen just need to follow that. The monitoring of the policy implementation process has a monitoring agency. I myself do not have time to supervise and I do not know anything to monitor”.

The issue of citizen capability to influence participation in local governance is also recognized by elected representatives and state officials. They believe that some information related to policies, planning projects, budget implementation plans and the like will cause confusion for locals. Therefore, locals do not want to comment if it does not affect their interests.

“To implement publicly and transparently projects, the authorities have publicly published information on local development planning and plans at the People's Committee from the district to the commune. However few people read or comment. We also announce this information in seminars, neighborhood meetings local officials and elected representatives do not receive much feedback from locals”. (Interviewee 4)

“I think a lot of information related to local development planning and planning requires a certain understanding. Therefore, it is easy to understand when people have difficulties in accessing this information. Because of the fact that there are very few people who can understand all the fields”. (Interviewee 5)

It can be seen that the content of information with high complexity, citizen capability to perceive a problem on a particular field as well as the irrational in the implementation of information has caused the term mechanism related to citizen participation in local governance.

“Although we organized meetings to implement projects, information on socio-economic development plans, information and locals opinions on draft laws and the like, there are still many difficulties for people to approach. For example, the government makes public planning but not all people understand how the planning map is. In other words, the current publicity and content are not good for citizen to access. This limits their participation”. (Interviewee 6)

“There are locals who do not keep pace with all the policies and guidelines of the state. The government has to inform many times to explain to locals, but due to some subjective reasons like those issues do not affect them. This is a reason why they also do not pay attention to understand these issues”. (Interviewee 2)

In summary, citizen capability is also one of the barriers that limit their participation in local governance. It is identified from a lack of knowledge about a field, the ability to understand the content of policies, administrative decisions, and the level of awareness of the rights and benefits that people get when participating in a program and a project.

Another barrier mentioned by half of respondents is the inefficient two-way interaction among citizens and elected representatives, local authorities. This means that the interaction, the exchange of information between the people and the government has enormous gap. Information that is reflected or proposed by citizens may be received by the government but the resolution is still delayed. Even many unresolved reflections make people lose faith in local authorities. This leads to negative consequences that citizens do not earnestly participate in activities related to local governance.

“Citizens attend meetings organized by local authorities, they listen information, understand that information, and even have feedback on the information disseminated. When locals comment on government activities, it proves that people are interested in the local situation. However, it will be unfair if this is only maintained by one side, while the other only receives information without feedback as well as no appropriate solution to resolve. Therefore, the lack of two-way interaction will be detrimental in encouraging citizen participation in local governance”. (Interviewee 8)

Dialogue or interaction is the activity maintained by the local government to ensure participation and comment on local priority issues as well as monitoring local governance activities conducted by citizen. However, solving the problems of the people and the community is another story. In this respect, many people are annoyed by the comments that they themselves have not yet respected.

“Many comments, but the government has not solved much. At any meeting, the people contributed back to the comments that had been commented from previous meetings. Local authorities also only record and then complete the task. This is the reason why people rarely contribute suggestions or reflect on local issues”.

(Interviewee 13)

In addition, the interaction between the government and the people is also limited by the irresponsibility of government officials. This is determined by a local official.

“There are two reasons that affect the two-way dialogue, reducing citizen participation. Firstly, the frequent absence of local officials in meetings with people. Secondly, the two-way dialogue between local officials and locals has problems. Currently, according to the process to have effective neighborhood meetings, the opinions in the previous meeting must be informed to locals. At that time, locals can realize the benefits and continue to participate in government management activities. If citizen opinions reflect many times but are not explained specifically, they will definitely reduce their participation because they think their opinions are not respected”. (Interviewee 2)

Thus, it can be seen that the two-way dialogue between citizens and local authorities if not maintained continuously, reasonably or in other words is overlooked, is a major barrier affecting the citizen participation in local governance.

Although only 2 out of 16 mentioned it, the influence of traditional governance is a barrier affecting citizen participation in local governance. Traditional governance is backward governance in a way that it imposes top down management. This outdated governance system pays little attention to citizen opinions and reflections in issuing decisions, applying policies. In other words, traditional governance makes the citizenry reluctant to participate. It also led to a high reliance on government decisions.

“Many people are still affected by outdated management so they are afraid to mention activities related to local government. I realize that many residents want to comment but they are afraid of being involved or troublesome for themselves and their families, so they do not want to participate”. (Interviewee 15)

“Participating in local governance is a problem that I find difficult to implement. The policies and decisions from the top down are fine. Besides, I have elected representatives, let them handle it. But I myself don't know anything to contribute ideas”. (Interviewee 9)

In summary, the data collected indicate that there are four types of barriers affecting citizen participation in local governance, including a lack of information; citizen capability; the two-way

dialogue or interaction citizens and authorities, elected representatives and the influence of traditional governance. As these barriers have been identified, there will be ways to help citizens overcome these barriers. The next section will provide suggestions to enhance citizen participation in public governance in the future.

5.3.3 Promoting citizen participation

Increasing citizen participation in public governance means that activities to help citizens overcome barriers can negatively affect citizen participation in local governance. As in the previous section, there are many barriers which restrict citizen participation, while the majority agree with the need to increase the participation of citizen in local governance. Therefore, identifying ways to encourage citizens to actively participate in local governance will be necessary to ensure governance effectiveness. Especially with the new rural construction Program, strengthening citizen participation not only supports the government in accomplishing the criteria but also helps to promote citizen mastery. This is why most respondents confirmed that citizen participation should be promoted in the future.

“In the future, the role of citizen in local governance will be more important and will increase further. The criteria of the new rural construction Program are increasing and the requirements of life are getting higher and higher, if we only rely on the government, it will probably be impossible to meet the needs of the people. Therefore, citizen must participate in the activities with local authorities”.

(Interviewee 3)

According to data collected through in-depth interviews, most of the respondents said that to increase citizen participation, it is necessary to ensure information regarding decisions, policies and the like. This is one of the important ways to overcome the barrier of information shortage.

“The government wants citizenry to participate more, they must provide timely information to them. In the era of scientific and technical development, we easily access many sources of information from television programs, social networks, but the local information that if the government does not provide them, we cannot know. As the result, if we do not know, how can we participate in comments, participate in discussions or participate in decisions”. *(Interviewee 10)*

It is similar in the case of *Interviewee 16*. She stated that authorities must ensure openness and transparency of information.

“Authorities must openly and transparently implement guidelines, policies, works, especially those in the new rural construction program. Over the years,

thanks to the new rural construction Program, citizens are increasingly actively involved in local governance. Because the criteria and the works are informed to the citizenry, so they know, even discuss, comment and monitor the quality of the works. In short, just being open and transparent will help citizen participate more”.

There is an introduction of information channels that citizens can actively access local sources of information and contribute to citizen awareness is also a solution to enhance participation.

“The government needs to inform the citizenry what channels they can participate in. For example, at present, the locality has an online Binh Chanh canal which is a channel where the government can receive feedback from locals and respond or explain them. In addition, the local authorities also developed an online public service model that not only addresses administrative procedures but also enhances people's awareness. In short, effective information and communication channels will reduce the lack of information. This will help people understand and participate more in local governance”. (Interviewee 5)

“The limited awareness of the citizen about the rights and obligations of local governance in general and the new rural construction program is one of the barriers affecting their participation. In order to mobilize citizen participation, barriers to participation need to be removed. The citizenry need to be aware of the benefits of participating in local governance. Propaganda to raise people's awareness through information channels must also be carried out regularly and continuously in the process of mobilizing citizen participation”. (Interviewee 7)

In order to enhance information, many people suggest that two-way dialogue or interaction between government and citizens should be maintained and improved. This means that the localities need to ensure the channel receives comments or feedback from the people. At the same time, it is necessary to effectively implement the reception, explanation, and resolution of opinions that citizens have commented.

“With the legitimate aspirations of citizens, the authorities make an effort to tackle them. If they cannot be solved, the government should have a clear and reasonable explanation for the citizens. But let locals comment many times that the government cannot solve it and there is no explanation for locals. This means that without two-way interaction, locals will not want to participate in local governance activities”. (Interviewee 8)

“The two-way dialogue or interaction is not only done in the new rural construction Program but also in administrative reform. Enhancing two-way

information to definitely resolve the questions people have. Any issues that do not fall under the jurisdiction of the locality must also have explanations and instructions for the people to understand”. (Interviewee 1)

According to data collected through in-depth interviews, most of the respondents said that to increase citizen participation, it is necessary to ensure information regarding decisions, policies and the like. This is one of the important ways to overcome the barrier of information shortage.

“The leading role and direction of the government, in particular local officials, is very important. This means that the government needs to motivate people to participate in local affairs”. (Interviewee 9)

“I think that officials must be professional and responsible. Because many residents will not cooperate from the beginning, because they have not seen the benefits of participating. In this case, officials and public servants must explain and orient citizenry so that they have a basis to understand and participate. For example, environmental monitoring in the new rural construction program, at first, locals may not see the benefits of participating in monitoring. However, when there are explanations from the authorities related to the harmful effects of environmental pollution, such as infectious diseases, biodiversity reduction and the like, they will understand and participate. At that time, they will participate in monitoring or providing information on environmental pollution so that the authorities can promptly resolve”. (Interviewee 7)

Interviewee 10 and Interviewee 16 emphasize the pioneering of local officials in governance to encourage citizens to join.

“Regarding the quality of citizen participation, I think local officials must be bold and pioneering in all activities. When locals recognize the responsibilities of these citizens, they will increasingly actively participate in local governance. In other words, officials and civil servants must dare to do, dare to take responsibility, and perform until the final results are achieved. Then citizenry will automatically support and join the government. Because it brings benefits to locals, the community. Locals feel that they are respected and facilitated to promote their right to participate in management.”

“If you want to do anything, first of all, there must be a staff with expertise in the field to be deployed. In fact, many meetings to encourage citizens to contribute ideas or share their aspirations, however, there is no professional staff, how to

explain to the locals clearly. Not to mention whether they answered citizen opinions. Therefore, there are qualified staff as the key to enhancing citizen participation”.

To promote the important role of cadres, civil servants, *Interviewee 6* and *Interviewee 9* stated that training courses and district training are needed to ensure their skills in encouraging citizen participation.

“Local authorities need to open conferences, workshops, training classes to improve the knowledge and skills of cadres and civil servants on new methods and tools applied in attracting citizen participation. In addition, they need to be supplemented with methods to conduct consultations so that they can do well the mobilization of citizen participation in the process of building new rural areas in the locality”.

Strengthening the role of socio-political organizations is also a solution proposed by the respondents to allow citizen to overcome barriers to restrict their participation in local governance. Socio-political organizations have long been an important part of the political and administrative apparatus in Vietnam. With an important role in supporting the government in information and propaganda, it is also a bridge between the government and citizenry.

“At present, the grassroots government apparatus cannot penetrate all activities in the residential area. The main task of government is management. However, support for the government also has political and social organizations which have the function of propagating and mobilizing citizen. In this respect, these organizations with much "centipede" force can closely follow citizen to receive opinions and aspirations. Even these organizations can receive feedback from citizen to transfer to local authorities. In particular, these organizations also protect the interests of their members who is also the citizenry. Thus, this can be considered an important force in encouraging citizen participation”. (*Interviewee 3*)

“Citizens participation will be more effective when the Fatherland Front and socio-political organizations promote the role of social advocacy, supervision and criticism. From the comments, the reflections of the citizenry will be evidence for social and political organizations to transfer to local authorities. At the same time, these organizations will oversee the settlement of those petitions. In this respect, it will definitely encourage citizen participation”. (*Interviewee 7*)

Regarding the enhancement of citizen participation, the issue of mechanism to ensure that participation is implemented and maintained is also a proposal that receives much attention. This is reflected in the promotion of democracy, emphasizing the role of citizens in local activities:

“Solutions to enhance citizen participation in socio-economic development planning need to recognize citizen as the main actors. The fact has shown that citizens are only actively involved in the socio-economic development planning process when they are aware of the benefits of that participation. In particular, when they are empowered to decide the issues where they live, it will be a favorable condition for people to play a role in local governance”. (Interviewee 6)

“Issues related to the rights and interests of the citizen must be paid attention to, in particular, locals must promote their role as subjects in determining problems and solving problems. The government only provides the necessary "materials", while deciding what to do and how to do it, locals are the decision makers. Thus, it is to stimulate locals to be more responsible in participating, not only to contribute more but also to discuss what is best for the locality”. (Interviewee 5)

Prestigious citizens in the community are always the objects to actively support local activities. In local governance, the role of these people is also important in encouraging citizens to participate in solving local problems. That is seen from the view of *Interviewee 11*:

“Promoting the role of prestigious people in the community, I think this should be considered. Because these locals are reputable, have a strong voice to contribute to the orientation of public opinion as well as citizens involved in implementing policies and programs such as the new rural construction Program, for example”.

“In my opinion, a prestigious people plays an important role in local development. These are people who have the ability to mobilize other people to participate in community activities as well as they always have a voice, have practical suggestions for the government in solving problems arising in the locality. In other words, promoting the role of prestigious people is also a way to enhance citizen participation”. (Interviewee 3)

5.3 Summary of the results

In summary, this section clearly presents the views of the interviewees related to citizen participation in local governance. Through the research context as well as the case study of the new rural construction Program, barriers which can affect citizen participation and the ways to help them overcome barriers are identified in order to make citizen participation in local governance better in the future.

Citizen participation in this study is expressed in many different perspectives drawing from the data collected from citizens, elected delegates and local officials. In particular, the majority of respondents stated that citizen participation in local governance is voting in

elections to elect elected representatives who represent the rights and voice of citizens in front of the government. In addition, many people were aware of citizen participation as citizens giving their opinions in meetings organized by local authorities regarding policy and project decisions. Moreover, participation is strengthened when citizens participate in local socio-political organizations. Citizen participation is also understood as the contribution of residents' physical activities and property resources to local activities that have occurred four times during the information gathering process. Interviewees stated that citizen participation relates to their empowerment in final decision making as well as to their right to inspect and supervise local government programs and projects.

Although the majority of people think that citizen participation has increased over the years because people receive many benefits from participation, playing out as increased democracy. However, there are also some who have stated that citizen participation tends to decrease because of the lack of responsibility of local managers in organizing meetings or receiving the opinion of citizens. Even, many people are indifferent in participating because they think that the local governance is of the government. In addition, the interviewee pointed out that the completion of the new rural construction Program in the near future will reduce citizen participation in property and labor contribution.

The survey results also show that citizen participation is limited by barriers related to lack of information; citizen ability; interaction between citizens and elected representatives and local officials; and finally, the influence of traditional governance. In order to limit these barriers, or to increase citizen participation, the data collected shows that there is a need to provide information for citizens; improve two-way dialogue or interaction between authorities, elected representatives and citizens; improve the sense of responsibility and professionalism of local officials; enhance the performance of socio-political organizations and prestigious people in the community; ensure mechanisms related to participation; and finally, democracy in the empowerment of citizens.

Chapter 6:

Discussion

The purpose of this discussion section is to discuss the research findings presented in the previous section as well as to explain their implications for the study. To do this, the discussion will be based on research questions and literature reviews to evaluate the results found to bring new insights, new discoveries and new contributions to citizen participation.

The first of findings refers to the context in which the study took place, namely the new rural construction program in Binh Chanh district. The purpose of understanding the context is to clarify how citizen participation in local governance takes place in a specific the new rural construction program with the goal mentioned in the previous section. Through the study of similar rural construction programs in countries such as Japan and South Korea, presented in the literature review, it can be confirmed that the new rural construction Program in Binh Chanh district has helped this locality to utilize human resources in addition to the resources of society and the government to develop the economy and improve people's living standard.

In addition, this program also has important contributions to local governance with community participation (So et al., as cited in Heo and Kim, 2016) as well as promoting the citizen participation in community development (Douglass, 2015). Through data gathered from in-depth interviews, local people are almost aware of the results of the new rural construction Program. Therefore, it is not too surprising that citizens tend to actively participate in activities related to building a new rural for local development. It is because that their interests as well as their needs and aspirations are satisfied and they are more confident in solving community problems themselves (Dang, 2012).

Related to the concept of citizen participation based on the understanding and perceptions of the interviewees, there are different views shared by interviewees and interesting contributions to this study. First of all, due to the interview sample selection based on three main groups including citizens, elected representatives and local officials, there are many differences in educational level, life experience and ability to identify research topics. In the case of local people, the concept of participation is the contribution of labor, funding, opinions to local activities as well as the right to vote to elect their representative agency - which is the People's Assembly. Local officials and elected representatives, meanwhile, said citizen participation was not limited to labor, funding or ideas but it also involves empowering citizen in final decisions as well as increasing democracy when citizens participate in local governance. However, research data has shown that the concept of citizen participation is not strange to the interviewees.

Specifically, most of these people know that citizens can participate in public governance in the form of direct (election) and indirect (through elected representatives and social organizations).

In other words, they are aware of the benefits that come from this aspect. As Callahan (2007) and Ariti et al., (2018) mentioned that the State should focus on citizen participation because it helps citizens to express their legitimate aspirations and needs; At the same time, this also creates a reliable bridge between government and citizens, between citizens and citizens through fairness, equality in policy as well as gaining benefits from the community. Indeed, despite the various roles in society, the interviewee is aware that participation is possible when citizens can express their views, opinions and desires to gain acceptance from government side. For example, citizens are increasingly encouraged to contribute their ideas when the State makes amendments to the Constitution or supplements laws to suit the reality. Citizens have also actively contributed ideas and criticized the regulations that are not suitable to social reality. This has helped the State take advantage of the creativity and wisdom of citizens while promoting democracy in encouraging citizen participation in governance. Moreover, the view of participation is the contribution of labor force and funding when the State mobilizes the contribution of citizens, which is also supported by many people. This is also seen from the research of Chirenje (2013), in which the author stated that citizen is the provider of resources and labor for local programs and policies.

Therefore, community participation in local governance decisions is essential. This means that when citizens contribute money and labor, they can monitor and evaluate whether the implementation of local programs or policies is really commensurate with what they have contributed. This is important in constructions related to the new rural construction Program. Because these are projects serving the community, it is necessary to have a contribution, discuss and select the optimal solution, co-implement and finally monitor and check the quality of these works. This is similar to Ellen Abakah's (2018) statement that participation is meaningful when the individual is directly involved and in control of their own participation process. By participating in local governance activities, when negative things happen, participation from the point of view will also help the government assess the public opinion and find ways to solve the problem as well as reaching consensus in society.

On the other hand, participation is seen in the way that people are empowered. When empowering citizens or the community in final decisions, the responsibility and initiative in implementing governance of the people increases. It is because that they realize the benefits of making decisions as well as the respect of the government in ensuring that decisions are made. In addition, empowerment is an opportunity for people to develop skills so that they can participate in contributing ideas and making decisions related to their aspirations (Madzivhandila

and Maloka, 2014; Johar, 2017). Empowerment is the highest level of citizen participation in local governance. In other words, empowerment includes the fact that people have been provided with information, provided opinions, participated in problem identification, and discussed together with state agencies on an equal basis. In the new rural construction program, people are empowered when they are involved in solving local problems through the slogan "People know, people discuss, people do, people check" and "The State and the people work together". In particular, empowerment gives local disadvantaged people the opportunity to participate in activities that they used to have little or no participation in (Blair, 2018; Pandeya, 2015).

In his research, Olimid (2014) refers to citizen participation in political, social and administrative activities. At the same time, he also affirmed that citizen participation and citizen commitment are very important to the local government. Through the data collected, this study has shown that citizen participation in local governance is also linked to citizens' commitment to the social organizations in which they participate. Social organizations in Vietnam include: political organizations, socio-political organizations; social-professional organizations and self-governing organizations. Through activities prescribed by the Party and the State, social organizations contribute to the state management, ensure social security, order and safety as well as protect the rights of members. In other words, when participating in these organizations, citizens indirectly participate in local governance activities, because these organizations represent the will and aspirations of members in the organization. At the same time, these organizations also perform the function of criticizing issues that arise in society. Especially in Binh Chanh district, local self-governing groups play an important role in mobilizing the participation of citizen since the activities of self-governing organizations are close to everyday life such as protecting the environment, ensuring security and order, activities for the community. Therefore, citizen participation in these activities is also indirectly involved in local governance. This is explained more clearly through the self-management groups which can capture the thoughts and aspirations of the citizen as well as closely monitor the state management activities in the community. As the result, these organizations have recommendations or impact on these activities locally.

The second objective of this study is to explore the barriers that can affect citizen participation in local governance as well as how they overcome those barriers. The main barriers are the challenges that arise in the development of society. It may be the rules and methods created from the process of managing and maintaining social stability (Callahan, 2007).

Findings of this study have pointed out the barriers that affect citizen participation in local governance, especially the new rural construction program. Many stated that the lack of information is the biggest barrier affecting their participation. It means that citizens only really

participate in state governance when information resources related to the activities of state management agencies are made public to citizens (Apakhayev et al., 2017). Citizen participation will be guaranteed as they become aware of problems that arise locally. This means that citizens will have ideas or feedback on policies, programs or decisions that the State can take specific measures to solve the problems. When a lack of information occurs whether subjective or objective, what the local government receives is a decrease in citizen participation. This may cause difficulties for the State in calling people to follow policies and programs set by the State (Public participation and citizen engagement, 2015). The lack of information is also related to the issue of power sharing as well as the decision-making of government officials. Citizens can only be provided with public information when local authorities encourage citizen participation in local governance.

Citizen capacity is also a barrier affecting participation. Citizen capacity refers to an understanding or knowledge of a number of issues related to their rights and interests. If the ability is limited by a certain reason, it will affect their participation (Foster-Fishman et al., 2013) specifically if the citizen is not aware of information provided by the government and does not know how to engage in governance activities (Chowdhury and Aktaruzzaman, 2016). In fact, although citizen's legal knowledge has been constantly improving over the years, there is still a huge gap in citizen capacity, especially citizens in remote communes or citizens in difficult communes. As a result, citizens have an incorrect perception, fails to grasp the Party's guidelines as well as policies and laws of the State on local issues. There are even many people who think that the new rural construction Program is the duty of the State, and citizen just need to know, they do not need to get involved. This also greatly affects citizen participation in local governance. Unlike in other countries, the capacity of the citizen in the study area is not affected by gender issues. This means that women and men can be restricted from participating if they lack capacity or ability to relate to local issues.

Regarding the two-way dialogue or interaction between citizen and government, this is also seen as a barrier affecting citizen participation in local governance. It is explained that when citizens have comments and feedbacks to the local authorities, they do not receive answers from the authorities. Even these issues are reflected many times but local authorities do not provide a specific explanation. In Blair's study (2018), he argues that an accountability helps the government to ensure public service as well as ensure citizen participation, while strengthening democracy. It was explained that failing to guarantee a two-way dialogue could cause a loss of confidence in the government. This means that citizens feel their contributions are not respected so they do not continue to participate in local activities. Disruptions in the connection between

government and citizens can have negative consequences in community engagement, in solving local problems and in local governance (Harriger as cited in Olimid, 2014).

In this study, the influence of traditional governance has been identified as a barrier that exists and exists so far. Traditional governance style from top to bottom at all levels has been maintained for a long time in Vietnam. This causes stagnation and a lack of management flexibility, reducing democracy even it eliminates the opportunity of citizen participation. In addition, traditional governance also creates a large barrier in the relationship between government and citizens (Waheduzzaman, 2010). That means that citizens are worried or have an attitude of fear of local government officials leading to complete dependence on the government (Dang, 2012). Therefore, they do not contribute opinions or respond to problems that the local is having (Madzivhandila and Maloka, 2014). Current governance with the goal of citizen can increase citizen participation in local governance in general and improve the efficiency of management activities in particular.

To overcome the barriers that negatively affect citizen participation in local governance, especially in the new rural construction Program, there are many identified solutions but mainly they focus on solutions related to information disclosure and transparency; to improve two-way dialogue or interaction; to improve the responsibilities of cadres and civil servants; to promote the role of social organizations as well as prestigious people in the community; and to ensure mechanisms regarding citizen participation. With regards to information disclosure and transparency, the government should has a mechanism to make citizen information complete and timely, especially interested in clearly explaining such information in accordance with citizen's level of knowledge. Inadequate information provision leads to difficulties in accessing information of citizens (Ariti et al., 2018). When citizens have specific sources of information, they have the ability to contribute ideas, feedback policies to help the government improve and implement the policy more effectively. Public disclosure and transparency are also a way for the government to leverage citizen's intellect in decisions and policies, while promoting democracy in encouraging citizen participation. In particular, as the development of information technology becomes more and more popular, mass media and e-government will play an important role in disclosing information to the public (Aladalah et al., 2015; Apakhayev et al., 2017). It can guide citizens to solve problems of themselves and the community, and at the same time help State agencies operate properly and more effectively. In addition, when the development of the media to support the disclosure and transparency of information, this also indirectly raises citizen awareness. Citizen awareness plays a decisive role in citizen engagement because awareness is the basis for action. Therefore, the effective solution is to make citizen more aware and self-conscious in participating in social work and local management activities.

Citizen participation in local governance plays an important role in solving problems arising in social reality as well as implementing democratic governance principles (Rolfé, 2018; Lawton and Macaulay, 2013). Increasing citizen participation is an important solution to promoting democratic rights and improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the administration (Stoker as cited in Aulich, 2009; Michels, 2012).

Besides being concerned about informing citizens, improving the two-way dialogue between government and citizens as well as stakeholders should also be considered. This means that when citizens easily access information relating to the activities of state agencies, It also allows for an extended dialogue between citizens and government agencies as well as between citizens and stakeholders. It also guarantees citizen right to information (Apakhayev et al., 2017).

Improving two-way dialogue means that the parties ensure interaction between questions and answers. When the two-way dialogue is strengthened, it will encourage cooperation in problem solving between the parties as well as final decision making (Bovaird and Loeffler, 2016; Huang and Feeney, 2016). When citizens understand and participate in local governance, it will provide benefits to citizens, governments and other stakeholders in solving problems that arise in the community (Clark and Guzman, 2017). As such, enhancing two-way dialogue or interaction both contributes to improving efficiency in problem solving and also contributes to strengthening citizen participation in public governance. However, it would be ineffective if there is a lack of responsibility, lack of professionalism from local officials as well as elected representatives. Citizen participation is of interest to local authorities because of the growing consensus among citizens and local officials (Seyed et al., 2018). That means, citizens see the responsibility as well as the respect of local officials and elected representatives for their voices and opinions. Local officials and elected representatives are aware of the role, positive and limited aspects when people participate in local governance as well as impacts of participation in government capacity building processes (Copus, 2010). In addition, these people need to ensure their capacity and qualifications to do well in propaganda, to mobilize citizen participation in state management in general and to build new rural areas in particular. At that time, citizens realized their aspirations and reflections were concerned and resolved by the authorities. As a result, citizen trusts and participates more actively in local governance (Kim, 2010).

Regarding promoting the role of social organizations and local prestige, in Vietnam, socio-political organizations are an important bridge between authorities and citizens. Through the Operational Regulation, these organizations conduct oversight and review of Party and State policies as well as the rights of its members, in particular, citizens. Similarly, promoting the role of local prestige is also a solution to help citizens overcome barriers related to participation. It is

because that local prestige is an important force to help the government approach citizens as well as through it to encourage citizen participation. In other words, in a "weighted" voice, social organizations as well as reputable citizens are an important bridge to encourage citizens to participate in local governance. Finally, ensuring the mechanisms related to citizen participation is also a solution to help people overcome barriers that limit their participation in local governance. There are many perspectives on the efficiency and coordination of citizen participation in public governance (Quick and Bryson, 2016). Therefore, ensuring the mechanisms related to participation must be taken seriously. That means the central and local governments must improve the mechanism to mobilize citizens and stakeholders to participate in State management. Compared to the past, the current issue of participatory governance has been more focused. Particularly, Ordinance 34 stipulates clearly what content is public, what content is discussed, what people know, people do and people check. In addition, the Politburo also issued Decision 217 on the Regulation on social supervision and criticism of the Vietnam Fatherland Front and socio-political organizations; Decision 218 on the Regulation on the Vietnamese Fatherland Front, socio-political organizations and people to contribute to building the Party and the government. Thereby, the State is also increasingly enabling citizens to participate in building government and local governance. There is even a future expectation of a citizen empowerment mechanism to contribute to increasing their participation in local governance. Aladalah et al. (2015) argued that when empowerment appears elements of power and control are shared by the government with citizen. This is also the motivation for citizens to participate in local governance.

To sum up, although there are different views regarding participation, it can be seen that citizen involvement plays an important role in local governance, especially in the new rural construction program. In addition, many barriers have been discussed in this study in addition to the mentioned solutions that contribute to increasing citizen participation in local governance.

Chapter 7:

Conclusion

7.1 Summary of the study

This study clarifies citizen participation in local governance in Vietnam, in a specific case of citizen participation in the new rural construction Program in Binh Chanh district, Ho Chi Minh City. The objective of this study is to enrich the knowledge of citizen participation in local governance. Putting it in a more specific context, this study explores the different possible points of view of citizen participation, identifying barriers affecting citizen's participation in local governance; explores ways for citizens to overcome that barrier, or in other words, ways to increase citizen engagement in case research data indicates that engagement needs to be strengthened. To achieve this goal, two research questions were posed: How is citizen participation understood in the case of new rural construction Program in Binh Chanh district, Ho Chi Minh City? What are the possible barriers for citizen participation and how they could be overcome?

To answer these research questions, the researcher used a qualitative research approach and used in-depth interviews to collect research data. In July 2019, the researcher conducted 16 face-to-face interviews with three target groups, including residents, elected representatives, and local officials.

The findings of the study reinforce the knowledge related to citizen participation in local governance. Concerning the first research question about the interviewee's understanding of citizen participation, it is found that there are many different views on participation because the researcher performs with 3 groups of interviewees (citizens, elected representatives and local officials). In particular, citizen participation is understood as voting participation in the election of delegates; is contributing opinions in meetings related to projects and policies organized by the government; is the contribution of labor and assets to local activities; is empowered in final decisions.

Regarding the second question, the researcher found that there are many barriers that affect citizen participation, including: The lack of information, the capacity of citizens, two-way dialogue or interaction between citizens and elected delegates and local officials, and finally the influence of traditional governance. These barriers have constrained citizen participation in public governance. Especially in the case of the implementation of the new rural construction Program, these barriers seriously affect democracy assurance as well as the possibility of program success. Because, the goal of the new rural construction program is to promote resources of citizens in joining local government in building and developing.

Regarding the last question, findings indicate that citizen participation in local governance needs to be strengthened. This means that the interviewees stated that citizen participation is important to help local governments operate more effectively. There are many ways to increase citizen participation in public governance, including: Enhancing information disclosure and transparency; improving two-way dialogue or interaction between local officials, elected representatives and citizens; strengthening the responsibilities of cadres and civil servants; promoting the role of social organizations as well as prestigious citizens in the community; ensuring mechanisms related to citizen participation, and reinforcing the efficiency of citizen empowerment in final decisions. Specifically, when ensuring publicity and transparency of information, citizens will understand the advantages and disadvantages of the locality and contribute ideas.

In addition, when local officials and elected representatives maintain interaction and dialogue with citizens, the government can take advantage of citizen knowledge to improve governance. In this case, the responsibility and professionalism of those working in the government apparatus is a necessary condition for citizens to share their own opinions. In addition, citizen participation in socio-political organizations also helps increase their participation. Finally, ensuring the mechanisms involved in participation and focusing on the issue of citizen empowerment in final decisions have shown democracy in local governance.

7.2. Reflections

The purpose of this study is to understand the phenomenon of citizen participation in public governance in Vietnam, particularly in the context of the implementation of the new rural construction Program in Binh Chanh district, Ho Chi Minh City. In order to do this, the study investigated the different perspectives on citizen participation of local living and working locally. The sample size only satisfies answering the research questions within a locality of Ho Chi Minh City implementing the new rural construction Program. Therefore, it may be misleading to apply the results of this study in other localities or in other broader contexts. Especially, when applying research results in other countries, deviations may exist due to the institutional differences in the countries compared to Vietnam. In addition, this research only draws on the views of the interviewees on the phenomenon of citizen participation in local governance. These are their views and they cannot be generalized. That means researchers want to learn more about citizen participation and how it is expressed as well as possible barriers and how they overcome them locally. In addition, this study does not address the views of immigrants because the first goal of the new rural construction Program is to help local citizens improve their lives. It means that this program will enhance the link between local citizens and

the government in implementing the new rural criteria for local development. Second, immigrants are highly mobile between different regions and localities. Therefore, it will be very difficult for researchers to collect data as well as difficulties for these people in the interview.

Regarding the methodology, due to time constraints, the qualitative approach is used in this study. In-depth interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data. This is suitable for the purpose of exploring and analyzing a phenomenon in which variables are not constructed and analyzed. However, due to the small sample size, the results cannot be generalized as in the quantitative study with larger sample sizes. Therefore, this study could serve as a basis for a larger quantitative study of citizen participation or other relevant issues that this study has explored. In theory, this study uses the Emerging approach and the Stakeholder approach to identify factors related to citizen participation and their application to different audiences. It also underscores the need to increase participation as part of increasing democracy which is increasingly emphasized in countries.

In addition, the application of the theory of participation, which is presented in Chapter 3, also helps this study to assess the feasibility and success of developing citizen participation in public governance. However, a larger scale study is needed to reinforce the assertion that citizen participation in local governance should be strengthened.

7.3. Suggestions for Further Research

This study provides significant evidence that the phenomenon of citizen participation in local governance is considered in the context of the implementation of the new rural construction Program. Through these reflections, some recommendations for future studies can be considered. Firstly, future studies may expand the scope of the study to other areas, for example towards citizen participation in urban areas or relating to increased empowerment in participation.

Because the scope of this research is limited to local residents, expanding the sample to immigrant populations may provide additional knowledge about citizen participation in local governance. At that time, future studies may have more insight as well as comparisons among different population segments. In addition, future research can use a quantitative approach to generalize and represent the population as a whole through larger sample sizes. In addition, more comprehensive studies can analyze differences in practice across countries to determine whether citizen participation in local governance should be increased.

Finally, from the results of this study, policy makers and government officials can research a new policy to encourage citizen participation in governance as well as promote greater to empower in final decisions to strengthen democracy in all activities of national construction and development.

7.4. Practical implications

This research contributes to knowledge related to participatory governance by clarifying the concept of participation, identifying barriers to participation as well as examining how citizens overcome through these barriers, or in other words, to increase citizen participation in governance activities. Findings from the study show that there are still many barriers that seriously affect citizen participation and stakeholders still have to deal with if they want to increase future participation. On the part of local officials, elected representatives, these groups need to reconsider their roles and responsibilities in interacting with citizens. Encouraging citizens to participate in local governance can only be done if they see the respect of the administrator and the benefits from participating in governance activities. In addition, policies and activities to encourage participation need to be focused to be able to remove barriers that negatively affect citizen participation. To do this, policy makers need to pay attention to maintaining citizen participation in local construction and development activities. With the rapid development of industrialization, modernization and urbanization taking place in Vietnam, besides the achievements, the Vietnamese government also faces social issues. Therefore, a policy to encourage citizen participation in public administration will help the government to take advantage of the ideas and ideas from the citizens. The fact remains that people are directly affected by the programs and policies implemented. Participation in local governance or greater empowerment of citizens in final decisions can strengthen democracy as well as limit mistakes in governance.

In addition, the recommendations derived from this study can be useful for research related to citizen engagement as well as promoting citizen engagement in governance-related activities. Citizen involvement in local governance depends on the specific contexts of each locality and each country. As a result, there are approaches that can help increase citizen engagement in one area but may not work in another due to differences in political, economic, social and cultural context. Therefore, in order to maximize citizen participation in local governance, a mechanism to encourage participation is essential. This mechanism will make the managers see the importance of citizen participation. At the same time, citizens also understand their own important role in local development.

Finally, increasing citizen participation in other words, increasing democracy is always a central issue in the policies of the Communist Party of Vietnam. The concept of “take the population of the original work” has always been at the forefront of the Party and the State in all guidelines and policies. Therefore, increased citizen participation in public governance will bring about achievements in national construction and development.

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Appendix

QUESTIONS ABOUT PROMOTING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE: CASE OF NEW RURAL CONSTRUCTION PROGRAM IN BINH CHANH DISTRICT, HO CHI MINH CITY

Hello, I am a student of the MPA program. Thanks for accepting the invitation to participate in this interview. I am conducting research on the topic “Promoting citizen participation in local governance: The case of a new rural construction Program in Binh Chanh district”. To complete this research, I would like to receive your comments according to our suggested questions. I would like to record your opinion. The information you provide is very valuable for my research.

*** Background information / Warm-up questions:**

1. Gender:
2. Age:
3. Education level:
4. Current occupation:
5. How long the person has worked in the current occupation?
6. Can you describe what kind of tasks your work includes?

***Define and understand citizen participation:**

7. What is citizen participation about? How is citizen participation done? What does citizen participation mean to you?

[+ Describe citizen participation in your own words

+ How would you describe what it means to someone who does not know what it means?]

8. Is there some positive and/or negative things associated to citizen participation and why so?

[With that meaning, please describe the activities you have participated in the local? And your level of participation in those activities?

+ voting, community meetings, voter meetings of elected representatives, meetings on budget decisions, suggestions on implementation of projects, inspection and supervision activities, evaluating and accepting works related to the new rural construction Program...)

+ What motivates you to participate in those activities? Motive for the common good, motivation for personal gain and motivation for ability]

9. Has citizen participation increased / decreased during the recent years, specifically in new rural construction Program? How? Why?]

***Barriers**

10. What barriers affect your participation? Why?

[Is there barriers affecting your participation? And if they say yes, ask what and why. If they say No, ask why do they think there is no barriers.

- Influence traditional governance (this means that government officials and elected representatives do not value citizen participation);

- Social awareness

- The lack of information (this means that government officials and elected representatives do not want to share information with residents)

- Ability of the people (level of awareness of rights, obligations, laws ...)

- The level of information technology use to comment on legal documents

....]

*** The ways to promote?**

11. How do you see the role/meaning of citizen participation in the future?

12. Should it increased or decreased and why?

13. How should it be increased/decreased?

14. And if it should be promoted, then how?

Thank you very much!

Huynh Vu Long