“People know, people discuss, people do and people verify” is a Vietnamese phrase that perhaps best summarizes the goals of the Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI). PAPI provides objective information about citizens’ experiences and interactions with local authorities, thus “people know”. It provides a means for the discussion and validation of findings at central and local levels in order for people to discuss. PAPI illuminates the collective experience of what citizens do, enabling policy makers to act in their interests, thereby fulfilling the precept that “people do”. Finally, PAPI provides a tool to assess actual administrative performance allowing people to verify.

As Viet Nam achieves higher levels of development, citizens’ expectations about public services are also rising. In addition there is an increase in the availability of public and private services, citizens also expect higher quality delivery. To encourage state agencies, elected deputies, state officials, and public employees to meet this demand, citizen mobilization becomes more important in order to improve participation and oversight. Understanding citizens’ aspirations and experiences is of equal importance, and innovative tools to measure, monitor and discuss governance and public administration performance are becoming imperative to continue the transition towards more equitable and higher development levels. An important element in this transition will be the change from traditional approaches to people’s mobilization towards alternative mechanisms, whereby citizens take proactive roles in different processes of governance and public service delivery for increased human development in Viet Nam.

PAPI measures the standards of governance and public administration drawn from citizens’ experiences in their interactions with governmental authorities at different levels. As a tool to monitor performance, PAPI contributes to accelerating continued improvement in governance and public administration performance. In an environment reliant on “self-assessments” by government stakeholders to measure government performance, PAPI helps provide a bottom-up perspective, by studying people–centred experiences.

The design and survey methodology of PAPI has been validated through a step-by-step approach of piloting and iteration. In 2011, PAPI was further improved and implemented across all 63 provinces in the country. It captures 13,642 individual citizens’ experiences in a groundbreaking effort to support a more evidence-based policy making process. PAPI is
the largest and first-ever survey of its kind in Viet Nam. In total, PAPI is a composition of 6 dimensions, 22 sub-dimensions and 92 different indicators. With numerous graphs and maps, PAPI provides an extensive analysis of aggregate national level governance and public administration performance. It also offers a comprehensive picture of the current state of affairs regarding citizens’ experiences in 63 provinces. In addition, it renders a fully transparent process of computing 5,796 individually verifiable indicators, 1,368 sub-dimension scores and 378 dimension scores.

PAPI is a joint policy research implemented collaboratively between the Viet Nam Fatherland Front (VFF), the Centre for Community Support and Development Studies (CECODES) under the Viet Nam Union of Science and Technology Associations (VUSTA), the Committee for People’s Petitions (CPP) under the Standing Committee for the National Assembly (since February 2012), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Viet Nam.

Initial Reflections and Policy Usage of PAPI

In a context of increasing demand for the engagement of citizens in governance and public administration performance, PAPI has proven itself as an innovative way to inject objective and evidence-based measures into policy-making decisions. This pioneering effort to capture citizens’ experiences in their interactions with local authorities is making its way into mainstream policy making, policy implementation, and policy monitoring processes.

While PAPI was still in its early stages, findings from the report have already been used by different government agencies, development partners, and non-state actors to track performance and design strategies to address governance issues and improve public administration performance.

At the central level, there is increasing recognition of the PAPI data’s usefulness and credibility, which it derives from the research team’s careful adherence to state-of-the-art methodological standards. For instance, the Government Inspectorate (GI) and the Office of the Steering Committee on Anti-Corruption (OSCAC), which are in charge of the anti-corruption work in the country, have taken the findings from PAPI to complement their reporting requirements under the governmental corruption monitoring and evaluation frameworks. Additionally, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA), as a leading governmental agency in charge of the implementation of public administration reform (PAR), is looking at PAPI as a potential framework to guide and complement its upcoming set of PAR indicators at the central and local levels.

At the provincial level, PAPI is emerging as a critical reference tool as well. For the first time, evidence based on citizen’s experiences with governance and public administration is available to be used by different actors. For instance, authorities from the Central Highlands province of Kon Tum, one of the poorest and lowest ranked provinces in 2010, have requested that its district level authorities and departments develop a detailed action plan to enhance strengths and improve weaknesses. Importantly, the action plan aims at improving the services provided to citizens by local level authorities. In Da Nang, the Department of Home Affairs informed provincial leaders about its performance levels in PAPI. The data and the methodology provided by PAPI are being used as a reference in their efforts to monitor the performance of city departments and agencies. In Ho Chi Minh City the results have been analysed and incorporated into the province’s official policymaking process to further strengthen performance levels.

A Dashboard of Governance and Public Administration Performance

PAPI is a multidimensional metric system of mutually reinforcing processes that important for governance and public administration. PAPI looks at six different dimensions of provincial governance and public administration, including: (i) participation at local levels; (ii) transparency; (iii) vertical accountability; (iv) control of corruption; (v) public administrative procedures, and (vi) public service delivery. Each individual dimension is
a combination of three to four sub-dimensions and these are grouped from indicators respectively.

PAPI is a single index that helps illustrate trends in the performance of governance and public administration. Nonetheless, PAPI is not an end in itself. It comprises a rigorous dashboard that captures the complexity of governance and public administration reform efforts from the point of view of a representative sample of the Vietnamese population. PAPI collects timely information about what happens at the aggregate levels of governance, but also cares about what is happening at the individualized levels of key public administration issues.

In the search for good performers and examples of best practices and performance improvements, provinces can be grouped according to their scores. A first striking feature is that provinces can excel in some dimensions but lag behind in others. For instance, Ha Noi, Ho Chi Minh City and Thanh Hoa can be grouped in the top performer group (above the 75th percentile), but in different dimensions. Ha Noi performs well in terms of participation, transparency, and public service delivery, yet when it comes to control of corruption it falls into the group of low-average performers. Ho Chi Minh City performs well in transparency, control of corruption, and public service delivery, but trails behind in vertical accountability. Of the six most populated provinces with their population sizes from two million people, An Giang falls into the poor performing group (below the 25th percentile) in four categories: participation, transparency, accountability and administrative procedures. In addition, An Giang falls in the low average group regarding control of corruption while public service delivery seems to be its strongest area similar to the high average group.

Long An is the only province that systematically performs in the top or above the 75th percentile group in all six dimensions. At the other extreme, Long An’s neighbour, Tra Vinh province, and Ha Giang in the North, systematically perform below the 25th percentile.

**Dimension 1: Participation at local levels**

The first dimension captures citizens’ participation at the local level. It assesses the different opportunities for citizens to participate in governance and public administration. The main issues addressed include citizens’ knowledge of their opportunities for participation, the quality of elections, satisfaction with elected village leaders, and citizens’ contributions to the development of communes/wards’ public works and projects.

In this dimension Son La is the province with the highest performance followed by Quang Binh, Hoa Binh, Lang Son and Ba Ria-Vung Tau. Aside from these, other provinces in the group of top performers (above the 75th percentile with their scores from 5.650 to 6.642 on a 1-10 scale) are Bac Ninh, Binh Dinh, Quang Tri, Ben Tre, Long An, Ha Noi, Tien Giang, Dak Nong, Can Tho, Hai Duong and Phu Tho.

At the other end of the scale is the group gaining the score of below 5.092. These include Binh Duong, Ninh Thuan, Quang Ngai, Hau Giang, Soc Trang, Ninh Binh, Ha Giang, An Giang, Dien Bien, Ca Mau, Phu Yen, Tra Vinh, Bac Lieu, Tay Ninh and Binh Thuan. In this group, Binh Thuan and Tay Ninh have the lowest means, which are between 4.3 and 4.5.

The remaining 32 provinces, including the municipalities of Hai Phong, Da Nang, and Ho Chi Minh City, are between the 25th and 75th percentile, or with the scores ranging from 5.090 to 5.630, and represent the low and high average performing groups. The provinces in this group are tightly clustered, with only marginal differences in scores.

**Dimension 2: Transparency**

The second dimension of transparency assesses the flow of timely and reliable information about government services provision. In particular, this dimension focuses on citizens awareness and levels of information regarding social policies for the poor; legislation that affects citizens’ everyday lives; budget
and expenditures by communes/wards-level public administration agencies; and land-related issues.

The best performers seem to be concentrated more in the north and north central regions. Remarkably, most of the Mekong Delta and many of the southeast provinces are among the poorest performers. Among the municipalities, both Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City are in the best group, while Can Tho, Da Nang, and Hai Phong are found in the low average group.

Ba Ria-Vung Tau has the highest score at 6.850. It is followed by Ha Tinh, Nam Dinh, Son La, Lang Son, Quang Binh, Long An, Quang Tri, Yen Bai, Binh Phuoc, Ho Chi Minh City, Gia Lai, Ha Noi, Hoa Binh, Thanh Hoa and Thai Nguyen. The lowest score in the best performers group is 5.946.

At the other end of the range, Tra Vinh, Lam Dong, Tay Ninh, Ninh Thuan và Bac Lieu are in the low performing group. Other provinces, which belong to the poor performing group (below the 25th percentile, or below the score of 5.124), are: Kien Giang, Hau Giang, Ha Giang, Binh Thuan, Soc Trang, An Giang, Phu Yen, Phu Tho, Hung Yen and Vinh Long. The remaining 32 provinces belong to the average performing groups with the scores ranging from 5.085 to 5.938.

**Dimension 3: Vertical Accountability**

The third dimension covers vertical accountability issues and assesses the extent to which those who act on behalf of the government are answerable to citizens at grassroots level. This dimension assesses the level to which citizens contact public officials and civil servants at different levels to settle personal, household or village matters; the effectiveness and frequency of citizen complaints and denouncements; and citizens’ mechanisms for keeping the local governments accountable regarding public investment projects (e.g. People’s Inspection Boards and Community Investment Supervision Boards).

Quang Tri is the province with the highest score. It is followed by Quang Binh and Ha Tinh, two other provinces in central Viet Nam. Other provinces in the best performing group (the ones in the top 75th percentile) are Thai Binh, Nghe An, Nam Dinh, Hai Duong, Long An, Ha Nam, Hoa Binh, Binh Dinh, Quang Ninh, Thanh Hoa, Dong Thap, Phu Tho and Lang Son. Cao Bang, Hai Phong, and An Giang provinces have the lowest scores. Additionally, the poor performing group, which consists of provinces in the bottom 25th percentile includes: Phu Yen, Lai Chau, Tay Ninh, Ca Mau, Soc Trang, Hung Yen, Dong Nai, Ben Tre, Tra Vinh, Ninh Binh, Bac Lieu and Ha Giang.

The remaining half of the provinces, which includes Ha Noi, Ho Chi Minh City, and Da Nang, are in the average performing group. It is remarkable that except for Binh Dinh in the south central region and Dong Thap and Long An in the Mekong Delta, all best performers are found in the Red River Delta and north central regions of the country. Furthermore, more than half of the poor performers are concentrated in the Mekong Delta, the other half are dotted in northern Viet Nam. None of the centrally-run municipalities belong to the best performing group.

**Dimension 4: Control of Corruption**

The fourth dimension focuses on corruption. It examines the current problem of corruption and the extent to which citizens are motivated to denounce corrupt activities. While corruption is a broad issue, for the purposes of this analysis, the focus is on diversion of state funds for personal benefit; bribery; use of public property for personal gain; nepotism; abuses in the handling public administrative procedures; bribery in the provision of health care and education; citizens’ awareness of legislation on anticorruption; and perceptions of the effectiveness of anticorruption efforts by relevant state bodies.

Control of corruption sees a high degree of variation both across individuals and provinces. Long An is the top performer while Cao Bang is at the bottom. The difference in mean scores between the first and the last
ranked provinces is 2.33 points. If mean scores are compared, Long An (7.269) is the top outlier while Cao Bang (4.944) is at the bottom.

The second best performing group includes Binh Duong, Ca Mau, Binh Dinh, Dong Thap, Soc Trang, Tien Giang, and Ba Ria-Vung Tau, which are all south central and southern provinces. Southern provinces dominate among the group in the top 75th percentile provinces in this dimension. The top 10 provinces and 12 of the top 15 provinces are south central and southern provinces.

Among the ten poorest performers are Quang Ninh, Tra Vinh, Hai Phong, Ha Giang, Bac Ninh, Tay Ninh, Ninh Binh, Ninh Thuan, and Lam Dong (a mixture of urban, mountainous, border, coastal, highland and lowland provinces).

Dimension 5: Public Administrative Procedures

The fifth dimension is about a selected group of public administrative procedures. This dimension evaluates the implementation and performance of selected but relevant public administrative procedures in terms of intensity of use and efficiency of services rendered. In particular, the dimension looks at citizens’ experiences in accessing public administrative procedures when applying construction permits or obtaining land use rights certificates at the commune/wards and district levels. It is also based on questions about the quality of the public notary services and other procedures.

A high concentration of all 63 provinces is observed. The difference between the maximum and the minimum score is the smallest of all six dimensions. This suggests uniformity across provinces in terms of the performance in dealing with public administrative procedures in all four measured services. The low mean score also suggests that more needs to be done in all provinces to improve performance.

When provinces are grouped into quartiles there is a regional pattern. The best performers are more frequently found in the central and southern regions of Viet Nam. Bac Kan and Nam Dinh are the only two north provinces classified in the top performing provinces above the 75th percentile. Among the five centrally-governed municipalities, Da Nang is one of the best performers, while Ho Chi Minh City, Hai Phong, and Ha Noi are in the group of high average performers. Can Tho is in the low average performer group.

Dimension 6: Public Service Delivery

The sixth dimension relates to public service delivery. In this dimension, a selection of public services considered key in terms of improving citizens’ well-being, such as health care, education, water supply, and crime are examined.

The best performers are mostly concentrated in the central region, with Ha Tinh, Quang Binh, Quang Tri, Thua Thien-Hue, Da Nang, Quang Nam, and Binh Dinh above the 75th percentile. Meanwhile, the poorest performers are scattered in northern mountainous, central highlands, south central, and southern provinces.

Big cities tend to perform better in public service delivery. Except for Can Tho, the four other municipalities, including Da Nang, Hai Phong, Ha Noi, and Ho Chi Minh City, are among the top fifteen performers. Ha Noi remains behind the other three cities, but outperforms Can Tho.

An overall provincial level performance

PAPI’s philosophy is to highlight dimension specific performance levels in order to identify provincial strengths and areas for further improvement. A rich amount of data and information is provided by each of the dimensions analyzed under PAPI. In addition to the dimensional level disaggregation, following the footsteps of PAPI 2010, and in an effort to facilitate overall comparisons among provinces, PAPI is also and aggregate index. That is, the six dimensions can also be aggregated into a composite index to assess overall provincial performance. A composite index can help to identify good performing provinces, and learn from their good practices. It also helps to inform poorer performers with similar socio-economic conditions of the
good practices. Provincial comparisons may create competition among provinces to improve their performance.

To sum up, while the dimension-level analysis highlights varying degrees of performance, the following four tiers of provinces can be observed in the aggregate performance index using a scale from 6 to 60 points (a few provinces do not fit cleanly into these four categories because their confidence intervals are especially large):

• Top group of performers and above the 75th percentile with scores between 37.381 and 40.319: Quang Binh, Ba Ria Vung Tau, Long An, Quang Tri, Ha Tinh, Son La, Nam Dinh, Lang Son, Binh Dinh, Hoa Binh, Tien Giang, Thanh Hoa, Hai Duong, Da Nang, Ha Noi and Dong Thap.

• High Average group of performer with scores between 36.144 and 37.217: Ben Tre, Ho Chi Minh City, Nghe An, Thai Binh, Binh Duong, Bac Kan, Binh Phuoc, Gia Lai, Vinh Phuc, Thai Nguyen, Quang Nam, Ha Nam, Dong Nai, Phu Tho, Yen Bai and Dak Nong.

• Low Average group of performers with scores between 35.003 and 36.098: Bac Ninh, Kon Tum, Can Tho, Vinh Long, Tuyen Quang, Dak Lak, Quang Ninh, Bac Giang, Lao Cai, Ca Mau, Thua Thien-Hue, Hai Phong, Khanh Hoa, Kien Giang, Soc Trang and Lam Dong.


The provincial governance dividend in Viet Nam

The evidence provided by PAPI strongly suggests that good governance in terms of public administration and service delivery appears to go hand-in-hand with business environment and levels of human development at the provincial level in Viet Nam.

The relationships between PAPI and other development parameters (for instance, Gross Domestic Product—GDP, and Human Development Index—HDI) and the Provincial Competitiveness Index (PCI) are positively correlated and statistically significant. This means that places that do well on the PAPI also tend to perform well in term of economic growth, development and on the business environment. Nevertheless, the relationships are not perfect. For instance, some locations significantly outperform their evaluation by businesses. These provinces stand out as locations where citizens give higher evaluations to local leaders than would be expected given their rankings. In other words, these local administrations tend to favour the perceptions of individuals over business elites. On the other hand, some provinces have lower scores than would be expected from their GDP, HDI or PCI scores. These are places where citizens are less satisfied with governance and public administration in areas of citizens’ concerns.

For the most part, well-governed provinces tend to show up on top, regardless of the methodology used to gauge performance. On the other hand, there are differences regarding how businesses and citizens view governance performance, requiring different types of policies from local officials. Some locations manage the balancing act quite well, while others have yet to find the appropriate mix.