

# Building Urban Government in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam

**Dr. Bui Ngoc Hien**

Ho Chi Minh City Cadres Academy, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

Email: bnhien.vn@gmail.com

## Abstract

In the process of international integration, Vietnam's socio-economy has achieved great achievements. The urbanization process in Vietnam is happening on a large scale and at a fast pace, so the construction of urban government is an indispensable requirement. Therefore, the roadmap and implementation method must be studied seriously and comprehensively in order to build an appropriate urban government model, meeting the new requirements set out in terms of efficiency improvement and state management in the current context.

Ho Chi Minh City is a special city, a major center of economy, culture, education - training, science - technology, a focal point for international exchange and integration. Attracting and spreading to the southern key economic region, having an important political position of the whole country. In order to create a driving force for Ho Chi Minh City's development, in recent years, the city has developed an urban government, contributing to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of State management, promoting administrative reform, improving the investment environment contributes to the development of society. However, the construction of urban government in Ho Chi Minh City today has limitations. The article outlines the urgency, characteristics and issues raised in the construction of urban government in Ho Chi Minh City.

**Keywords:** *Urban Government, Socio-economic, international integration, Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam*

## Introduction

Urban areas are densely populated areas with high population density and mainly operate in the non-agricultural economic sector. According to the Law on Urban Planning of Vietnam, an urban area "is a political, administrative, economic, cultural or specialized center that plays a role in promoting the socio-economic development of a country or a region territory, a locality, including inner city and suburb of a city; inner and outer towns of the town; town". Vietnam is one of the countries with a fast urbanization rate, with 862 urban areas in 2020, contributing about 70% of the country's GDP (Duc Tuan, 2020).

Year	2009	2015	2016	2018	2019	2020
Urban number	629	787	802	819	833	862

**Table:** Number of cities in Vietnam over the years

(Source: Author's compilation from the following authors: NCIF, 2019; Quynh Anh, 2019; Duc Tuan, 2020)

Besides, according to the World Bank, from now to 2025, Vietnam's urban population will increase by about 2.4% per year, reaching the highest rate in Southeast Asia (Duc Hoai, 2020).

From the perspective of state management, by 2020, the model of state government organization in urban areas of Vietnam will comply with the Law on Organization of Local Government 2015. Accordingly, the model of state government in Vietnam will be implemented. administrative units (in rural, urban, island) of Vietnam, including the People's Council and the People's Committee. On that basis, the city of Hanoi develops and submits the Scheme and is approved by the National Assembly allow pilot organization of urban government model with the core content of "no people's councils at the ward level"; Da Nang city developed and submitted the Scheme and was allowed by the National Assembly to pilot the organization of an urban government model with the core content of "not organizing people's councils at the district and ward level".

In 2019, the National Assembly of Vietnam promulgated the Law amending and supplementing a number of articles of the Law on Organization of the Government and the Law on Organization of Local Government, effective from

July 1, 2020. On the basis of the implementation of the Law This and other legal documents, the Ho Chi Minh City government has developed a Scheme and approved by the National Assembly Resolution No. 131/2020/QH14 dated November 16, 2020 on the organization of urban government. in Ho Chi Minh City. Compared with the project of Hanoi city and Da Nang city, the project of Ho Chi Minh City has the following differences: (1) the urban government model is organized in Ho Chi Minh City, not in Ho Chi Minh City “pilot” such as Hanoi city and Da Nang city; (2) Failure to organize people's councils in districts and wards; (3) Establishment of a city under Ho Chi Minh City (Thu Duc city).

Currently, Ho Chi Minh City is organizing the implementation of Resolution No. 131/2020/QH14. However, in reality, the perception of the need; The legal basis and problems posed in the organization of the urban government model in Ho Chi Minh City have not yet been unified. These are the main topics discussed in this article.

## Research Methods

To make the article, the author mainly uses the theoretical framework of the State - a public organization with the mission of managing and developing all aspects of socio-economic life, to study the issues mentioned above. out in the article. This theory provides the author with an approach (based on the effectiveness and efficiency in the use of state power among different levels of government in the state apparatus, including the state government in urban areas). when analyzing and evaluating issues related to the research content. This theory poses a requirement for the author in the research process to ensure the comprehensiveness in research on state power, decentralization and authorization in the use of state power; respecting the history of development, perfecting awareness and institutions in the state apparatus of Vietnam throughout the research process.

At the same time, the author also relies on the theory of geo-politics in the research process when considering the geographical and specific factors of Ho Chi Minh City - the most dynamic and developing city in Vietnam. This theory helps the author as well as the readers of this article or those with related research, to confirm the need to organize urban government in Ho Chi Minh City to contribute decisively in the development of the city. sustainable development Ho Chi Minh City in the new development context.

Regarding research methods, the author mainly uses theoretical research methods, in which, the method of synthesis and analysis of documents is used the most. These methods are combined and used in the research process to provide a relatively comprehensive view of the research problems.

## Research results

### 1. Organize urban government in Ho Chi Minh City to meet state management requirements in urban areas with differences compared to other socio-economic regions of Vietnam

In Vietnam, the territory includes urban areas, plains, mountains, seas and islands. From the perspective of state management, in socio-economic regions are established corresponding to administrative units based on the criteria of population size, natural area, number of administrative units under their control, level of socio-economic development and specific factors of each type of administrative unit in rural, urban, island and special administrative - economic units. In particular, urban areas have different characteristics compared to other regions, which directly affect the establishment of administrative units and government organizations.

*(1) Urban areas are densely populated with highly educated people.* Cities are places of high population density. According to the results of the 2019 Population and Housing Census, the urban population is 33,122,548 people, accounting for 34.4% of the total population of the country. The urban population has a high level of education, mainly participating in non-agricultural economic activities. This feature makes the city always have an advantage over other areas in terms of the quality of human resources - the most important resource, in the following aspects: crowded, high quality and constantly added from other areas. Particularly in Ho Chi Minh City, the city increases by 200,000 people every year on average (Thanh Giang, 2019). The downside of this feature is that the high competitiveness in human resources leads to higher unemployment rates than other areas, which causes pressures for cities to ensure social security and social systems. other socio-economic consequences. According to the results of the 2019 Population and Housing Census, the unemployment rate in urban areas is nearly twice as high as in rural areas (2.93% compared to 1.64%).

*(2) Cities are places where “open” socio-economic activities take place.* Cities are places of convergence of social groups from different areas to live and carry out socio-economic activities. The specific characteristics and values of each social group are selected and adapted to integrate in the urban social environment. At the same time, the city is also the place where non-agricultural, multi-sectoral and multi-field economic activities take place; cultural exchange activities, economic trade with high frequency and speed. This fact makes the society in urban areas much

different from the society in the countryside, society in other areas, requires urban government "to be centralized, unified and operate smoothly, highly agile and cannot be cut into administrative territory like in rural areas" (Nguyen Minh Phuong, 2018).

(3) *Urban areas are under more pressure in socio-economic development than other areas.* In the master plan, the city is always identified as the center of a locality, of a region, the locomotive, orientation and leading the development of regions. Besides the advantages and potential in socio-economic development, cities also face many socio-economic problems such as: urban competition in the globalized environment, mechanical population growth, etc..., lack of social housing (only 41.7% met (Duc Tuan, 2020))... Besides, it is required to serve socio-economic activities, to serve the legitimate needs of residents urban population is growing. This is a big challenge for urban authorities in managing urban sustainable development.

The differences of urban areas compared to rural areas and other areas set requirements for the construction and operation of the government apparatus in urban areas to be organized in accordance with the characteristics of each city sufficient capacity for urban management and sustainable development.

## **2. Characteristics of urban government construction of Ho Chi Minh City**

Ho Chi Minh City is a special, largest, most dynamic and innovative metropolis of Vietnam, with a population of 8,993,082 people<sup>1</sup>. Ho Chi Minh City is the economic locomotive, the political and cultural center, the commercial and financial center, the gateway for international exchanges of Vietnam. "Ho Chi Minh City's aspiration is not only to maintain its leading position in the country, but also to close the gap and to catch up with successful cities in Southeast Asia and Asia" (Do Tra Giang, 2019). The development of Ho Chi Minh City has always played an important role in the overall development of Vietnam. In 2019, Ho Chi Minh City had outstanding achievements, the city's state budget revenue for the first time exceeded the milestone of VND 400,000 billion, reaching VND 412,474 billion, exceeding 3.34% of the target assigned at the beginning of the year, accounting for more than 27% of the total revenue of the country (in 2020, in the context of the COVID-19 epidemic, Ho Chi Minh City's state budget revenue reached VND 371,384 billion, reaching 91.51% of the estimate and down 9.40% compared to the same period (ZUKI, 2020). The GRDP index increased by 8.32% compared to 2018; foreign investment attraction reached 8.3 billion USD, up 39% compared to 2018; There were 1,320 newly licensed FDI projects, the number of newly established enterprises reached more than 44,000 (Tran The, 2020).

As a large city in Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh City also has all the characteristics of an urban area but has some differences, which directly affect the construction and organization of government activities Ho Chi Minh City:

(1) *Ho Chi Minh City is the place where the most exciting socio-economic activities take place in Vietnam*

Only the number of new businesses established annually in Ho Chi Minh City compared to the whole country has proven this statement in the economic field (in 2019, Ho Chi Minh City established 44,004 new enterprises, accounting for 31.86% more than the whole country (138,100 enterprises); national budget revenue accounts for more than 27% of total national budget revenue... In addition, Ho Chi Minh City is a locality where all ethnic groups of Vietnam live, in which, 53 ethnic minorities with 468,147 inhabitants, accounting for 5.2% of the city's population (Trong Ngon, 2019). In addition, Ho Chi Minh City is also a cultural center - where the most cultural and entertainment activities take place in the country; It is also the center of cultural exchange between Vietnam and the world... At the same time, this is also the place where the forces and bad actors take advantage of the organization and conduct anti-social activities, social evils, and other activities causing political instability, social order and safety, etc. This fact shows that the workload and complexity in the management activities of the authorities at all levels of Ho Chi Minh City is very large.

(2) *Ho Chi Minh City has the highest rate of mechanical population growth in the country*

As a socio-economic center of the country, Ho Chi Minh City is considered a promised land, attracting people from other localities throughout the country to live and establish a business. "An average increase of 200,000 people a year" (Do Tra Giang, 2019) is increasing the pressure on the sustainable development of the City. In addition to contributing to the increase in the quantity and quality of the City's human resources, this situation also increases more and more problems and pressures on the authorities at all levels in ensuring the quality of human resources, social security and sustainable development of the city.

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<sup>1</sup> Results of the 2019 Population and Housing Census.

*(3) Ho Chi Minh City is implementing the Project to build Ho Chi Minh City into a smart city, the City's Digital Transformation Program*

In order to take advantage of the opportunities of the times and effectively exploit the advantages and potentials of the City, the Ho Chi Minh City government has determined the goal of building Ho Chi Minh City into a smart city by 2020. 2025 in Decision No. 6179/QĐ-UBND dated November 23, 2017 of the People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City approving the Project "Building Ho Chi Minh City into a smart city in the period 2017 - 2020," vision to 2025". The project defines a vision to 2025: "Ho Chi Minh City will develop a relatively high and sustainable economy, on the basis of best exploitation of resources, with the people as the center of the city". The project also identifies four general goals: (1) Ensuring economic growth, towards a knowledge economy, a digital economy; (2) Effective urban management based on forecasting; (3) Improve the quality of living and working environment; (4) Enhance people's participation in management. The construction and management of a smart city is becoming a major challenge for most of the governments of the cities that build it. With the requirements in organizing the implementation of non-traditional management methods along with the potential for great risks and challenges, the construction and management of a smart city brings great challenges to authorities at all levels of Ho Chi Minh City. Implementing the National Digital Transformation Program, Ho Chi Minh City is the first locality in the country to develop and implement the City's Digital Transformation Program. The Digital Transformation Program of Ho Chi Minh City was approved by Decision No. 2393/QĐ-UBND dated July 3, 2020 of the People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City. The program has identified many goals and targets along with a system of comprehensive and specific tasks and solutions to achieve a vision of 2030: "Ho Chi Minh City will become a smart city with innovation. fundamental and comprehensive operation of the digital government apparatus, of digital enterprises and the prosperity and civilization of a digital society".

**3. Urgency for urban government construction in Ho Chi Minh City**

With differences compared to rural areas and other areas, urban areas of Vietnam in general and Ho Chi Minh City in particular, are posing many problems in management and development. Changing the organizational model of local government in urban areas is an urgent requirement for urban governments to meet the requirements of urban management and sustainable development in the context of new development suitable for each urban area. For Ho Chi Minh City, the urgency for the construction of urban government is reflected in the following aspects:

*(1) Issues raised in urban sustainable management and development in the new development context*

The new development context is taking place The Fourth Industrial Revolution, the trend of globalization and extensive international integration... brings many challenges in urban management and development such as: Management and control non-traditional socio-economic issues, becoming regional and global problems; Enhance the capacity and improve the urban competitiveness ranking of the City in the country, in the region and in the world; Managing and organizing the development of the City in the context of many impacts of globalization, international integration, climate change, etc.

*(2) Management and development of the City - a megacity*

As a special city, with a population of more than 10 million people currently living and working, Ho Chi Minh City is considered a megacity of Vietnam. Along with that, Ho Chi Minh City is the most dynamic locality in Vietnam, so socio-economic activities are many and complicated. This fact requires the City government to be organized and operate in a scientific manner, to ensure the organization and implementation of administrative activities of all levels of government in a dynamic and efficient manner. Otherwise, it will hinder or even hinder the city's development process, failing to ensure Ho Chi Minh City's role as a locomotive and development nucleus in the Southeast region in particular, and the South of Vietnam South in general.

*(3) Requires effective exploitation of resources for sustainable development of the City in the new development context*

The new development context, especially the Fourth Industrial Revolution, brings many opportunities to many countries and territories. Ho Chi Minh City - where many advantages and development resources converge, especially high-quality human resources. However, with the old mechanism and model, the City government cannot actively develop and organize the implementation of mechanisms and policies to effectively exploit the advantages and resources for development. The model of urban government opens up a model of more favorable mechanisms and policies (the model of a city within the city) along with a reasonably decentralized authority to help the City build its target orientation and basic system. regulations and policies to effectively exploit advantages and resources for sustainable development.

*(4) Requirements for innovation and improvement of governance efficiency at all levels of government*

State management activities of the City's government levels play a decisive role in the sustainable development of the City. In addition, the requirements of the people, businesses and tourists of the city require that the city government apparatus need to renovate the organizational apparatus and operating methods; improve forecasting and policy making capacity; building a contingent of cadres, civil servants, public employees... to improve the administrative efficiency of the City government. This fact also requires the City government to effectively implement the Project to build Ho Chi Minh City into a smart city, the City's Digital Transformation Program... along with promoting the application of digital technology, artificial intelligence; application of smart solutions in specific administrative activities of the City government...

**4. Political and legal bases on urban government model in Ho Chi Minh City**

Resolution No. 18-NQ/TW dated October 15, 2017 of the 12th Party Central Committee on some issues on continuing to innovate, reorganizing the organizational apparatus of the political system in a streamlined, efficient manner. To continue to amend, supplement and perfect the institution of building local government in the direction of clearly delineating the organization of the urban, rural, island government apparatus and administrative units. main - special economy; take the initiative in piloting where conditions are available”.

The 2013 Constitution and the Law on Organization of Local Governments, the Law on Amending and Supplementing a Number of Articles of the Law on Government Organization and the Law on Organization of Local Governments are legal documents containing the legal basis. on building and implementing urban government model in Ho Chi Minh City. Clause 2, Article 111 of the 2013 Constitution stipulates: “The local government level consists of the People's Council and the People's Committee, organized in accordance with the characteristics of rural areas, urban areas, islands, administrative units - special economic conditions prescribed by law”.

Clause 1, Article 2 of the Law amending and supplementing a number of articles of the Law on Organization of the Government and the Law on Organization of Local Government stipulates: “Local government is organized in administrative units of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Vietnamism prescribed in Article 2 of this Law is suitable to the characteristics of rural areas, urban areas, islands, special administrative-economic units”. Also in this Law, Clause 14, Article 2 stipulates: “The local government in the district is the local government level, except for specific cases where the National Assembly stipulates that it is not the local government level. The local government level in the district includes the district People's Council and the district People's Committee”; Clause 17, Article 2 stipulates: “The local government in the ward is the local government level, except for specific cases where the National Assembly stipulates that it is not the local government level. The local government level in the ward includes the ward People's Council and the ward People's Committee.

Thus, the construction and implementation of the urban government model in Ho Chi Minh City is in line with the Party's viewpoints and guidelines; policies and laws of the State.

**5. Problems posed in the construction of urban government in Ho Chi Minh City***(1) Completing and synchronizing institutions, mechanisms and policies*

Up to the present time, the legal regulations on the organization and operation of urban government have not been completed. The process of not organizing the People's Councils of districts, districts and wards in some localities in the period of 2009 - 2016 was piloted according to the National Assembly's Resolution No. 26/2008/QH12 dated November 15, 2008 on implementing pilot does not organize people's councils of districts, districts and wards. In 2019, Hanoi City and Da Nang City developed and submitted to the National Assembly for approval the pilot project of urban government model. In 2020, Ho Chi Minh City develops and submits to the National Assembly for approval a scheme on organization of urban government approved by the National Assembly on the basis of Clauses 1, 14 and 17, Article 2 of the Law on Amending and Supplementing a number of Articles of the Law on Government Organization and the Law on Organization of Local Government. However, these regulations are still general, “flexible” (“unless specifically provided for by the National Assembly...”). Maybe, in the near future, some other localities will continue to develop projects to apply for an urban government model. This fact poses an urgent requirement to perfect the institutional system, mechanism of organization and operation of urban government.

For Ho Chi Minh City, the National Assembly and the Government need to amend, supplement and complete legal documents on mechanisms and policies for Ho Chi Minh City (Decree No. 93/2001/ND) to create conditions for the City to build a model of urban government and sustainable development.

Within its competence, the city government needs to focus on perfecting the system of mechanisms and policies for the city's urban government to operate effectively. In formulating mechanisms and policies to build and develop the

digital economy, special attention should be paid to and effective application of the "sandbox" policy and mechanism building model to effectively manage and control the construction process. Building city government and managing and developing socio-economic efficiency.

In addition, the Government as well as Ho Chi Minh City authorities need to establish specific and feasible mechanisms and policies to develop Thu Duc city - the city's creative urban area.

#### *(2) Vision and political determination*

The city government needs to establish the direction and goal of building urban government in a consistent and transparent way with consistency in will, in each specific activity. The vision in urban government construction makes it convenient, feasible and effective to set goals, roadmaps and specific solutions to build urban government in each period. Political determination helps the process of building a unified, synchronous and continuous urban government. In addition, the vision and political determination in the construction of urban government are guaranteed to create consensus and active participation from stakeholders, contributing to improving effectiveness and efficiency.

#### *(3) The government apparatus at all levels is becoming more and more complete and "intelligent"*

The city's government apparatus at all levels plays a central role, deciding the effectiveness and efficiency in urban government construction. Along with the urban government construction roadmap, the city's government apparatus at all levels must step by step perfect and "smart" in the following aspects:

- (i) The urban government apparatus is scientifically organized, effective, efficient and gradually perfected on the basis of a reasonable combination and application of the following models: centralization, decentralization and decentralization. The City Government needs to study and propose a pilot model of one level of government (City level) and two administrative levels (City level and ward level) in some urban districts after 2030. No district organization is an administrative level that organizes city-level agencies in a decentralized manner, performing development coordination and management functions in each field and area of the city. This model is proposed when the City has successfully built a smart city and digital government, so management activities become smooth, consistent and timely. This model is also suitable for urban conditions with dense population density and complete transportation system.
- (ii) Building a dynamic, professional and talented City government personnel apparatus, especially the key personnel of the system, headed by the head. Establish a mechanism to attract "talented minds" in the non-state sector in the management and development of the City through projects and public service contracts;
- (iii) Establish a smooth, rhythmic and effective operating mechanism on the basis of clearly delineating functions and tasks of each agency and individual; establish clear relationships in the system; as well as establishing specific liability sanctions for each employee in the system; Establish a mechanism for publicity, transparency and effective control of governance activities at all levels of government;
- (iv) Close to the people, rely on the people to build the City's government apparatus through consultation activities and promote the role of City residents in controlling the governance of the government
- (v) Constantly innovating the governance of the City government through the process of building e-government and digital government along with the application of scientific and technological achievements in governance activities.

#### *(4) Secure resources to build urban government*

To build an urban government, it is necessary to ensure the following basic resources:

- (i) Powers of authorities at all levels of the City in setting goals, roadmaps, solutions to organize specific activities to build urban government. The City government needs to propose the central government and superiors to clearly decentralize, establish specific and clear powers and mechanisms for the city government to organize the construction of urban government.
- (ii) Financial resources, which includes authority to identify and organize lawful sources of revenue, within the jurisdiction. In addition, establishing a mechanism to allow the City government to organize the mobilization and use of resources among residents for sustainable development of the City.
- (iii) The belief of the urban community and businesses in the construction of urban government. This is an important resource for the City government to build urban government and manage and develop the City sustainably.

#### *(5) Create consensus and effectively mobilize the participation of stakeholders*

The participation of stakeholders demonstrates the government-people relationship, making an important contribution to the construction of urban government, reflected in specific activities such as: (1) Key consultation activities policies of the community of residents and businesses for policies, orientations and development goals

organized by authorities at all levels of the City; (2) Activities of participating in urban development investment in many forms such as: investment in the form of public-private partnership, investment trust for socio-economic development...; (3) Supervising the administrative activities of the authorities at all levels of the City...

In order to mobilize the participation of stakeholders in the construction of urban government and management and sustainable development of the City, the city's authorities at all levels need to establish mechanisms and design and organize activities mobilize the participation of stakeholders in a scientific and effective manner.

### Conclusion

Building urban government towards the goal of building an administrative apparatus in urban areas that is lean, dynamic and efficient to manage and develop sustainably in the new development context. Along with managing the ongoing rapid urbanization process, the State of Vietnam needs to pay attention to perfecting the system of institutions and policies to perfect the legal framework on urban government, promoting sustainable urban development. steady.

Ho Chi Minh City is the largest, most dynamic city and the center of economy, culture, education and science and technology. After three times developing and submitting the project, on November 16, 2020, the National Assembly passed Resolution No. 131/2020/QH14 on the organization of urban government in Ho Chi Minh City. In order to organize the urban government model in Ho Chi Minh City in accordance with Resolution No. 131/2020/QH14 effectively, it is necessary to unify awareness and be drastic and synchronous in actions in implementing transformations and ensuring ensure the necessary conditions to gradually meet the requirements of the urban government.

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### Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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