

A MANAGEMENT SYSTEM TO INCREASE PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IS NEEDED

by Prof. TUONG LAI

In a final analysis, social management implies human management in economic and cultural activities as well as to organize and control them. In organization and control, organization is a decisive factor; good organization includes good control where supervisees find no control on them.

The society operates in accordance to its own rules. The urban society is more complicated and diverse than rural one. Its rules thus have more differences. To impose the general managerial framework is certainly compulsory and hardly successful. HCMC is a special entity because it has unique properties of population, activity scope, economic role, and international trade. It used to be respected as a "Far Eastern Pearl." Its appropriate management criteria are an urgent requirement not only of local managers and residents, but also of central agencies, business people, foreign investors, tourists and so on.

As the society changes following its own rules, people try to get access to these rules through evidence and facts. The social laws of movement include a series of numerous elements interacting randomly. Any measure to transform the circumstance at will has a certain gap which needs to be identified and filled.

Moreover, it is increasingly recognized that in addition to "firm knowledge" like mathematics knowledge, most of knowledge that people acquire in daily life is unstable one which always needs re-verification. Therefore, to understand the reality and approach operational laws of the society is hard and the management of its operations is much harder. Different characteristics of individuals increase the sophistication of social operations.

When referring to the above facts, I want to stress the relativity of social management. I think we



should entertain no illusion about social management in the style of organizing and controlling its whole extremely complicated movement. Social activities can only be managed and impacted in their basic trends, they will self-tune their motion. That also implies people will adapt their behavior to social relations.

Social management is to manage human activities in the society. As a result, the key problem is to conceive who are the society's main players. Are there sufficient surveys on their features in activity, work, entertainment, leisure, as well as their joy and sorrow in this biggest city? Moreover, have the strongest and weakest points of the city's authorities been examined?

Only when these facts are recorded, we can know how the society self-harmonize its activities. If we know the structure of city population, for example, the percentage of immigrants from rural areas, the percentage of those who have no residential registration...we may understand the

city dwellers' habits in travel, garbage treatment, housing, health care, schooling, public sanitation, and so on.

It is sometimes ironically said that we seem to ruralize the city. This statement obviously makes us review the urban management regulations. In an international workshop on urban areas, one sociologist gave a humorous saying: "house is a verb rather than a noun." That implies urban managers should always understand house in a wider meaning: urban house is a production process, not only a product. If the manager understands house as a process, he will find it has complicated relations with other processes in the society. The sociologist considers urban housing based on social views, not economic ones. "Irregular houses", that is houses of the poor, will nullify all plans and management regulations. They will decide the image of a city, not following any model and embarrass urban managers. These managers may suggest politicians to launch a non-declared war of non-

urbanization or compulsory urbanization! The analyst argued that the research of irregular houses should be carried out, not only focusing on their appearance and facilities, but more importantly, on those who have built these houses or are living in them and their role in urban life.

I want to mention the democratic mechanism of urban management. An article on the *Lao Động* Newspaper, issued on Jan 15, 2001, refers to "the year of urban order" following the resolution of the HCMC People's Council in its sixth session. The article quotes the opinion of the Dutch consul general about traffic safety and urban sanitation. He said the problem might be well settled at low cost, even in a short time. The solu-

"Vietnam 2001: Entering the 21st Century - Vietnam Development Report".

International experience points to four pillars of good governance

Governance can be defined as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's social and economic resources for development. Good governance thus involves all the three sector - the state, private sector, and civil society. The interplay between these three groups of stakeholders is critical for achieving balanced socio-economic development and national building. It is premised on the universally applicable four pillars of good governance, namely:

Transparency: entails the free flow of low cost information that is understandable, reliable, and timely;

Accountability: the obligation to give answers and explanations concerning one's actions and performances, to those with a right to require such answers and explanations;

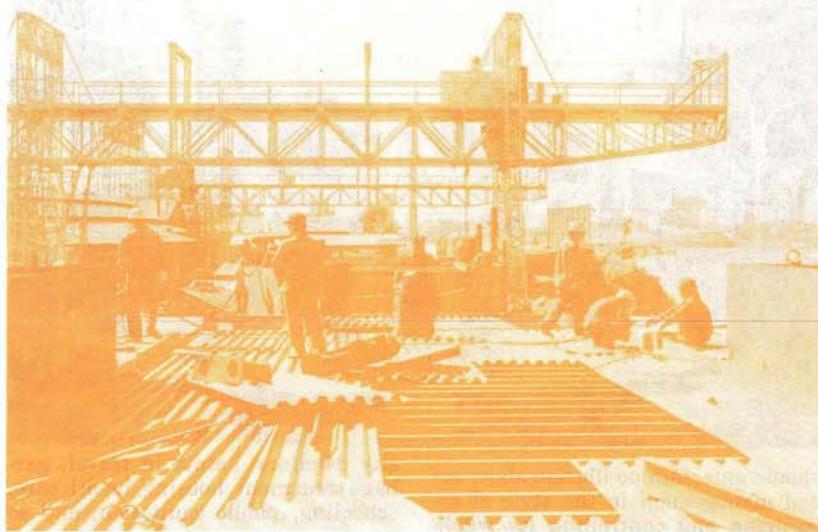
Predictability: refers to the rule of law and results primarily from laws and regulations that are clear, known in advance and uniformly and effectively enforced;

Participation: where every citizen has a voice in the decision making process, including the poor and the vulnerable.

These recommendations, I think, are useful to the establishment of HCMC appropriate management system which we all desire. These all four pillars are important and needed for building. However, from a sociological view, I want more detailed discussion about the fourth pillar: people's participation in a civil society of a state ruled by law. In fact, to want this point well done is to fulfil the whole three above pillars.

Regarding the city dwellers, I want to mention the city's two features requiring full attention as follows:

First, is the past 25 years enough to remove the inferiority complex of a group of the city citizens who feel they have not been real owners of the city? Here, I want to refer to those who were civil servants or soldiers of the former Saigon regime before 1975. They are easily vulnerable when facing the city bureaucrats. It is an extraordinary event when their rights are not fully respected. This is truly a challenge to the city leaders

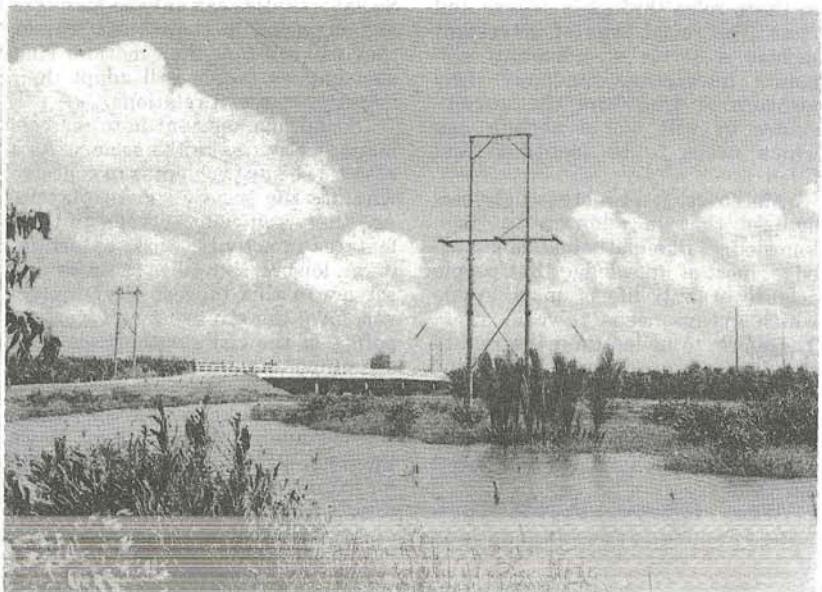


tion is to focus on improving the people's awareness. Every person must find his or her obligations in the year of urban order. I agree with him but this task cannot be fulfilled in a short time because it is not easy to change a life style.

However, we can achieve this if we have strong determination in a long time. Fundamental changes to the public habits in HCMC are a major long-term undertaking as intellectual improvement is a continuous journey.

Here, I want to say about the nurturing of citizen consciousness, the fostering of "people's participation, one of four pillars for good governance" as recommended by international donors at their meeting in Vietnam on Dec 14-15, 2000.

I would like to present some extracts from the "Public Administration Reform" in the World Bank's



when they long for generating development motives for the city. My opinion is also not new. The draft report of the Party's Congress IX says: "We need to respect differences that are not contrary to the national interests; abolish inferiority complexes, prejudice, and discrimination against the past, social classes, strata; and build a spirit of openness, mutual trust and future-oriented vision" (p.35), "We should remove all troubles and all obstacles with the aim to bring into full play the people's great resources" (p.62). The problem is how to turn words into deeds.

If the broad consensus cannot be reached, it is difficult to acquire sustainable development, it is also hard to involve Vietnamese who live abroad and still love their native land as well as to enhance the city unique advantages.

Second, the city population also includes free migrants. They are increasing and no administrative and compulsory measures can stop their mobility. According to the Constitution, they are legal residents of the city. However, some of them are easily deemed as "second grade citizens" of the city due to difficulties in the city infrastructure and facilities. They find hard to have a voice in the urban management although they are making not a few contributions to the city development, at the same time causing puzzles to the urban authorities.

International experience shows that institutional reform is rarely internally driven, requiring implementing ministries and agencies to initiate their own reform often proves not only to be a slow process but a self defeating task.

As a result, there must be a push from the supervisees. That implies to find motives of the administrative reform by democratizing the city decision-making and planning process. People must feel and see they are free to live and work for sake of themselves, so they have to respect the freedom by organizing the life of themselves and the community. These are necessary factors to build a civil society as well as a law-governed state of the people, from the people and for the people. To encourage the people's feedback on policies and solutions is the best way for state management.

Clients and citizens survey that incorporate feedback from citizens have helped improve public sector performance in many countries. The scorecard method pioneered by Sam

Paul in Bangalore, India, embodies this approach. It entails periodic citizen evaluations of local municipalities and their accounts of public services, bribery and extortion. Evidence exists that public agencies in Bangalore have taken concrete steps to improve service delivery.

In the past years, the HCMC has launched voluntary movements such as charity, gratitude houses, charity houses, and so on. The consciousness of a civil society not only results from the people, but also from the leadership who conceives the philosophy of "small state, large society" to give the autonomy to the people and create the channels to receive their feedback.

Only in that condition, we can implement the philosophy that many North European countries are pursuing: "The State must know to do nothing in order to know everything to do."

This work can be done only when a civil society is built from the people's real democratic rights. Just because of this, I want to underline the time and determination of changing the whole social life style. The city must stick to improving its residents' intellectual level in the long run, even decades. If the people's intellectual level is not improved. It is hard to implement the autonomy and the right to have comments on the authorities' policies, decisions and management solutions. Meanwhile, the qualifications of its civil servants must be urgently enhanced. It is urgent because "it is true that our machinery and civil servants' competence on the whole remains low as compared with their positions, more importantly, their virtue and dignity are also not in accordance with their responsibilities" (PM Phan Văn Khải).

I have read an interesting document. It is the publication on the right to get access to official documents in Sweden, published by the Swedish Justice Ministry in 1996. Accordingly, the democratic rights of the Swedish are legalized in details. Maybe this is one of reasons that the UNDP places Sweden in the top list of countries which have a clean state apparatus and no corruption.

Information suppression in the modern age - the age of information and knowledge economy - must be considered as a serious violation of the democratic right and a great barrier to development. The prevailing management system must be liberal, open and transparent in providing

every person with adequate information. So they can have sufficient evidence to believe they are living in an independent, democratic and free country and they can find the happiness for themselves and the society. Therefore, they are willing and active to take part in the social management and reduce the burden of the government staff whom they must pay tax to feed.

I think the HCMC specific management system will include a lot of concrete points and make favorable conditions for accelerating the city growth rate. That system must have basic factors to increase the people's participation and bring into full play of the city resources.

As mentioned above, Saigon used to be "the Far Eastern Pearl" and had a geographical location for which many Southeastern cities craved. However, the city is lagging far behind them and making great efforts to catch up with them. We should not forget this, not for recollection of the past, but to search for the energy and belief to succeed in the future. In that search, are we brave to dissect factors which curb the city development? In the meanwhile, do we dare to set the city target of "a new Far Eastern Pearl" to welcome friends in the region and the world? That determination and bravery are initially required in the city leadership - the policy makers. But the crucial factor is to develop the target into the city people's pride. As a result, they will have significant contributions to the city evolution. This is not new, but it is hard to do this.

Only when the policy makers are whole-hearted with the target, the pride and real interests to every resident of the city, the city can have a bright destiny. How to involve the people in the city destiny, I think, is the key to the new management system.

"We are going on the road which have not yet been mapped, we are bearing a heavy unprecedented responsibilities" (ex-PM Phan Văn Đổng), but our people are very brave and creative to know the road under their foot. Where there is a will there is a way. I hope the city will build a management system suitable for the existing activeness and innovation of the city people if the leadership fully finds the people's strength and make great efforts to make the best use and improvement of that strength. ■

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