

The Resolution 8 of the VCP Central Committee has suggested "keeping on building and perfecting the SRV State, and centering on the administrative reform". HCMC became the quickest to respond to this instruction when the HCMC People's Committee issued the Decision 6280/QĐ-UB providing procedures for getting land and house certificates, and procedures for transferring land and house use rights; after that different city services joined up to issue interdepartmental guidelines on granting building

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licence, granting land, renting land and changing purpose of land use. This effort has helped to revoke many complicated procedures which made trouble for the public.

An outstanding feature of the administrative reform in HCMC is the reduction in the number of officials working in city governmental bodies: the city People's Committee has reduced the number of subordinate bodies from 40 to 22, and some 6,000 officials were made redundant without bad effect on the administration. At district and ward levels, around 5,000 officials were also made redundant and nearly 1,000 houses were retrieved and used for the benefit of the public. One of the most active parts in this reform is the scheme to supply the "one-door, one-seal" administrative services in districts I, V, and Củ Chi.

The district I People's Committee is the first to carry out this scheme, from March 15, 1996. Citizens who want to establish new enterprises, open parking lots, repair houses, make a will or make complaints, won't have to visit all related offices, but all they need to do is to come to the reception desk. An official here will meet them, give advice, answer all questions, help them complete procedures, receive documents and make a date to return documents. It's worth mentioning that, at this one-door service, a citizen who wants to get house certificate has to visit this office at least three times. In some cases, it takes them a month and around seven visits to complete all procedures. This waste of time comes from the fact that the citizen didn't get enough information about what procedures he would have to complete so each time he visited the office he was informed that such-and-such document or form

was to be filled. And to complete a form, one has to have it sealed by the ward People's Committee or Police Office.

However, we should admit that this "one-door" mechanism has saved citizens from spending too much time and energy on having their documents signed and sealed by district officials. Nguyễn Trung Thông, Chief of District I People's Committee, said that the time spent on completing a procedure became shorter because "in the past, bad behavior or mistakes made by an official didn't come to the knowledge of somebody outside the office. Now, all activities of officials will be known by everybody because of the "one-door" mechanism. This forces them to do their tasks better".

After the "one-door" service was supplied on March 15, 1996, the "one-seal" service also came into operation as from July 8, 1996. Seals from seven

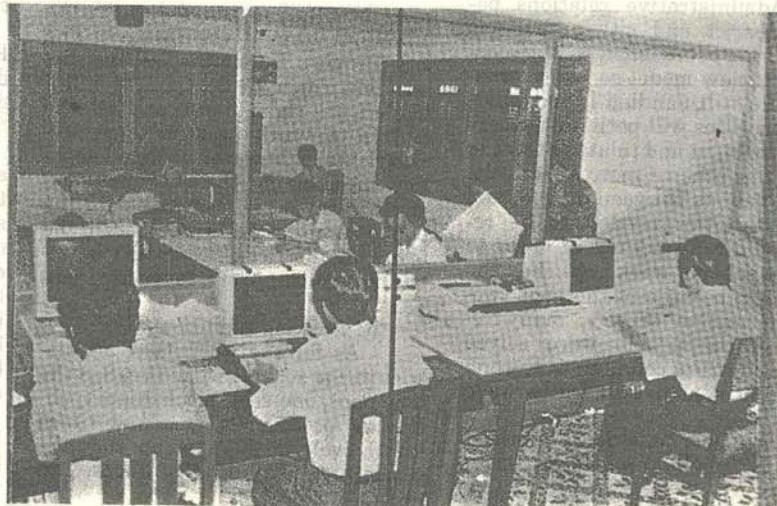
district offices (Economic, Town Planning, Personnel, Finance and Planning, Culture and Information, Health Care, and Justice) have been retrieved. Office holders were delegated to deal with problems in their fields as before and have the right to use the District People's Committee seal.

The District V People's Committee started to supply "one-door" service as from April 1, 1996. Unlike district I, the District V Committee had no building large enough for all district offices, so the people could come to these offices at old addresses but the reception desk there would receive their documents and make a date to return them.

The "one-door" service was started in the district V as of July 1, 1996. Seals from Economic, Justice, Personnel, Culture and Sports, Health Care Offices have been retrieved, the authority wasn't delegated to office holders but to Committee members who

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by MINH TÂM



had the rights to sign certain documents and seal them with the Committee seal. Thus, official correspondences sent by district offices have no seal on them although they are signed by office holders. As stated in the Law on Organization of People's Committee, district offices have really become assistant bodies of the district Committee.

However, troubles have made their appearance after seals were retrieved. A document signed by the head of the District Culture and Information Office for example, wasn't accepted by the city Culture and Information Service because it had no seal on. Lê Xuân Hồng, head of the district Economic Office said that in the past, there were 18 kinds of official papers that required the office holder to sign and seal. Now the district Committee has to either sign and seal these papers itself or delegate power to office holders.

Will the district Committee think that to seal and sign means to bear full responsibility and demand citizens to give the Committee more time to study before signing and sealing?

In the district V, the "one-door" service has also made troubles for many organizations: a band having licence granted by the city Culture and Information Services had to get permission from the district Culture and Information Office when they wanted to run a show; a company must be certified by the district Economic Office when its director wants to go to a trade fair, etc. Nguyễn Thành Nam, chairman of the District V People's Committee was right when he stated his opinion of the "one-door, one-seal" service in the district V: "How can we reform the administration when there was no change in procedures, even under the "one-door, one seal" mechanism? We want to struggle to point out unreasonable procedures

which are making trouble for the people".

By realizing the pilot scheme to supply "one-door, one seal" services in districts I and V (the district Củ Chi started this scheme in April 1996 and retrieved seals from district offices in August 1996) we can see that whatever the process is, it will produce good effects: a lot of time and energy of the people were saved; their requests were satisfied faster; the district committees could direct, inspect and supervise subordinate offices easier; many public buildings could be used for the benefit of the people; etc.

In spite of these effects, an opinion presented at the 6th session of the 5th-term City People Council has argued that the task of building and perfecting the State, or reforming the administration to be precise, couldn't be made overnight. An official report presented at this session estimated that in HCMC recently, the habit of working according to law has become more common. However, the task of publicizing government policies wasn't carried out well; many policies were studied carelessly and negligently; meetings of local residents although they were held regularly but produced no intended effects, because in these meetings, local

authorities usually informed about matters which residents didn't interest in. As for what they interest in, such as land and house ownership, procedures for getting building or business licence, etc. local authorities could make no change to them, because these matters were decided by the central Government.

Moreover, the bureaucracy which hasn't been improved for a long time is also an obstacle to the administrative reform. In HCMC, a survey conducted by the HCMC Party Committee revealed that the public opinion was mentioning three forms of bureaucracy: (1) Conditional and negative bureaucracy comes from the localism and leads to new procedures set forth by local authorities (these procedures are even more complicated and time-consuming than the existing ones). These procedures make trouble for the people and force them to spend a lot of time and energy and even money on completing a procedure. (2) Irresponsible bureaucracy is commonly found in leadership (office holders or directors) who pay no proper attention to their tasks and tend to have their tasks done by subordinate officials. If their inferiors lack sense of responsibility and want to exploit this negligence of

their superiors, both the people and office holders will have to pay the penalty. (3) Obstruction bureaucracy could be found in office holders who only study and direct the office operation in conference hall, but take no measures to control and supervise office operation with the result that the office becomes badly managed and causes a lot of difficulties to other offices and the public as well.

The pilot scheme has just carried out in the said three districts. But at the city services and offices, citizens are still meeting with the red tape. When will the "one-door" services be supplied by these government bodies? According to Phạm Thành Hòa, Vice-Chairman of the City Commission on Administrative Reform, "For the time being, the city People's Committee has instructed subordinate services to review their workload and make plans to realize the "one-door" mechanism in their own offices. In addition, after the pilot scheme was realized, the city authorities will petition the Government to revise all administrative procedures, and an administrative center will be formed in HCMC as informed in the Notice 47/TB-UB-QLĐT issued on May 20, 1996 by HCMC People's Committee"■

