Equitable and Effective Development in Vietnam: The Rural Public Services Index

**WHAT:** A Rural Public Services Index (RPSI) to monitor and measure the provision and performance of public services in rural Vietnam

**WHERE:** Piloted in Ha Nam, Binh Dinh and Vinh Long provinces

**HOW:** A random household survey on performance of public services in localities

**CONTEXT**

Rapid urbanization has dramatically transformed Vietnam and this process will only intensify in the next decade. As the urban population has multiplied in response to the economic and social dynamism of modernizing cities, it has placed tremendous demand on critical infrastructure and key public services. Given the central position of cities in the country’s economic growth, government devoted an increasing amount of resources to improving services; from roads to public transport, from housing stock to schools and hospitals, and from water to electricity delivery. While demand still far outstrips what is available and much remains to be done Vietnamese cities are benefiting from a much expanded menu of public services than in the past.

This situation contrasts sharply with that in the rural areas. Although in the last few years the government has prioritized the improvement of public services for rural inhabitants, the provision of services remains poor, costly, and uneven.

Increasingly there is an urban-rural gap: in 2008, 77 percent of urban dwellers in Vietnam had their garbage collected and 66 percent were able to access their water through public pipes, while in rural areas the numbers were only 15 percent and 7 percent respectively.

Service provision varies significantly; not only between rural and urban areas but also between region, province, and even locality. In 2008 98 percent of Vietnamese had access to the electricity grid. Every region achieved connection rates in the high nineties except for the North West region where the connection rate was only 82 percent. The best served province has three times as many teachers per thousand pupils compared to the worst served. Some provinces have more than three times as many health workers per capita as others. This variation is replicated at the local level where the capacity of service providers at the front line is often limited. Where one district’s agricultural extension may provide rural households with targeted advice, the district next door may offer little support.

**RUDEC conducts research on the ground, interacting with farmers, policy makers and development practitioners to develop sustainable solutions addressing food security, hunger eradication and regional equality in agriculture and rural development.**
RATIONAL
Some 70 percent of Vietnam’s population are engaged in agricultural activities. Their productivity and well-being are of critical importance to the country’s economic and social development. Yet rural inhabitants have little opportunity to provide feedback on or influence the quantity, quality, efficiency, or effectiveness of the public services they use. There is no existing monitoring and evaluation tool that can help the government to assess the performance of service providers and demand improvements. In response, the Rural Development Center of the Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development (RUDEC/IPSARD), with financial and technical assistance from The Asia Foundation, has been developing the Rural Public Services Index (RPSI). Designed to assess the quality of public services in a local area, RPSI is based on the experiences and perceptions of rural residents who are the actual users of these services. Through their feedbacks, provincial and national governments can measure the quality of the different public services and the performance of the service providers, as well as gaining a more concrete understanding of the real needs and demands of rural citizens.

THE RURAL PUBLIC SERVICES INDEX (RPSI)
A team of experts at RUDEC/IPSARD and The Asia Foundation have been working on the development of RPSI since 2008. Central to the RPSI is a household survey questionnaire, which is structured around three main pillars:

- **Accessibility:** the ability to access and benefit from rural public services;
- **Performance:** a measurement of outputs and/or behavior in service delivery; and
- **Dynamic:** accountability and responsiveness of the service delivery system.

The index is currently focused on four major rural public services (clean water supply, healthcare, veterinary, and agricultural extension) and has been piloted in Ha Nam, Binh Dinh, and Vinh Long provinces. These three provinces were selected to address local variations in geography, social history, and agricultural and healthcare development.

RPSI is a pioneering set of performance-based indicators, tested and refined on a set of key public services operating in contrasting conditions. While its implementation alone will not transform rural public services, the data it provides forms the basis for a productive dialogue between the state and citizens and enhanced transparency and accountability. By emphasizing joint problem solving, learning from best practices and impacts that can be measured, RPSI seeks to contribute to the Vietnamese government’s effort to improve the quality of public services for all.

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