

Training and fostering Ward People's Committee Chairpersons in the two-tier local government model: new requirements and strategic directions

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Abstract: *This article examines the context of transitioning to a two-tier local government model in Vietnam and the new requirements it poses for the training and professional development of Ward People's Committee Chairpersons. It also evaluates the current state of training programs. It proposes feasible, modern solutions based on a competency-based approach, technological application, and a strong linkage between training, assessment, and the utilization of cadres. The study builds upon and synthesizes theoretical research and practical surveys to contribute to improving the institutional framework for training and fostering Ward People's Committee Chairpersons, thereby meeting the demands of sustainable urban development.*

Keywords: *Training, professional development; two-tier local government; Ward People's Committee Chairperson.*

1. Introduction

Vietnam is entering a period of profound institutional reform, focusing on reorganizing local government towards a streamlined, effective, and efficient model aligned with the goals of sustainable urban development. In this context, innovating the training and capacity-building of grassroots leaders - particularly Chairpersons of Ward People's Committees - has become an urgent requirement.

Under the two-tier local government model, the ward becomes a basic-level administrative unit under the province, directly responsible for urban management

tasks that were previously handled mainly at the district level. This shift not only requires adjustments in the functions and duties of wards but also significantly increases the role, workload, and complexity of the leadership and management responsibilities of Ward People's Committee Chairpersons. Consequently, new competency requirements emerge, including integrated urban leadership thinking, cross-sector coordination, data-driven decision-making, digital technology application, urban risk management, policy communication, and consensus-building within society.

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However, current training and professional development policies for civil servants in general, and for grassroots leaders in particular, lack any program specifically designed for the position of Ward People's Committee Chairperson. Existing programs rely heavily on generic civil service training frameworks issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs, which are highly theoretical, insufficiently differentiated by position or locality, and fail to meet the practical needs of modern urban governance. The absence of a standardized competency framework for this position has made it challenging to design curricula, select methods, organize delivery, and evaluate the effectiveness of training.

Moreover, a local-level civil service learning ecosystem has yet to be established - an essential element to promote lifelong learning, on-the-job training, and continuous skill updating aligned with specific job requirements. Meanwhile, Ward People's Committee Chairpersons play a crucial role in grassroots urban governance, especially in Class IV and V urban areas, which make up the majority of Vietnam's national urban system. These shortcomings indicate that maintaining traditional approaches to training is no longer suitable in the current context of institutional reform and governance transformation.

Therefore, studying the current situation, analyzing challenges, and proposing strategic directions for the training and capacity-building of Ward People's Committee Chairpersons is essential. This effort is not only critical for ensuring the effective operation of the two-tier local government model but also represents a key step in enhancing the quality of local leadership, modernizing public administration, and promoting citizen-centered sustainable urban governance. Importantly, this article also aims to propose policy solutions for developing a specialized training program for Ward People's Committee Chairpersons - addressing an urgent gap in Vietnam's current legal framework and cadre management practices.

2. Requirements for the training and capacity-building of Ward People's Committee Chairpersons to meet the demands of sustainable urban development

2.1. General concepts of training and capacity-building

According to the Dictionary of Education (Chinh, 2002), training is defined as "a goal-oriented teaching and learning process aimed at forming knowledge, skills, and attitudes for learners to meet the requirements of a specific occupational field." In the public service sector, training is often associated with preparing cadres and civil servants for their responsibilities, or when they transition to new job categories and positions.

Capacity-building (or in-service training) refers to the provision, updating, and enhancement of knowledge, skills, and attitudes for cadres, civil servants, and public employees during their service, helping them perform assigned tasks more effectively or adapt to the new requirements of their positions. Decree No. 171/2025/ND-CP dated June 30, 2025, stipulates: "Capacity-building must be based on job positions, linked with the use and management of civil servants, aligned with training and capacity-building plans, and consistent with the needs for building and developing human resources, particularly high-quality human resources of agencies and units." Compared to training, capacity-building is more flexible, shorter in duration, and its content usually addresses specific tasks, emerging trends, or practical situations.

According to Hai (2018), the training and capacity-building system for cadres and civil servants in Vietnam's public sector is influenced by three major factors: (1) The national legal and policy framework for the development of public human resources; (2) The capacity and operational mechanisms of training and capacity-building institutions, such as the Academy of Public Administration and Governance (APAG), provincial political schools, staff training centers, and sectoral training schools under ministries and agencies;

(3) The coordination, commissioning, and evaluation mechanisms from the employing agencies.

For grassroots-level governments such as Ward People's Committees, training and capacity-building are not only compulsory to meet professional standards but also play a pivotal role in enabling Ward People's Committee Chairpersons to: (1) Adapt to changes in institutional, technological, and urban development models; (2) Acquire multi-sectoral management and cross-sectoral coordination skills, as well as community mobilization capacities-skills that are increasingly vital for sustainable urban development; (3) Clarify competency standards for public leadership; (4) Support more effective planning, evaluation, and utilization of ward-level leaders.

In the context of digital transformation, training and capacity-building programs also play a crucial role in building systems thinking, digital competence, and public service ethics, which are foundational elements of modern urban governance.

2.2. The role of training and capacity-building in developing the competence of Ward People's Committee Chairpersons

In the current complex and fast-paced development of Vietnamese cities, Ward People's Committee Chairpersons are no longer merely grassroots administrators but have become central figures in organizing and steering sustainable urban development at the local level. In this context, enhancing the capacity of Ward People's Committee Chairpersons cannot rely solely on traditional experience or individually accumulated skills; it requires a systematic and formal support framework, in which training and capacity-building serve as strategic and indispensable tools.

First, training and capacity-building are formal mechanisms for shaping and upgrading the core competencies of Ward People's Committee Chairpersons under conditions of institutional transformation and urban modernization. More than "supplementing

knowledge," these activities contribute to reshaping governance thinking, problem-solving in uncertain contexts, inter-sectoral coordination, and leadership skills in complex urban environments.

Second, training and capacity-building act as tools for transforming the role of Ward People's Committee Chairpersons from administrative managers to developmental public leaders. In modern cities, grassroots leaders are no longer confined to performing linear administrative tasks; they must actively design local initiatives, mobilize social resources, manage risks, and work alongside citizens in building sustainable living environments.

Third, training and capacity-building are crucial for enabling Ward People's Committee Chairpersons to adapt to digital transformation and new urban governance technologies. As urban data becomes an essential management tool, Ward People's Committee Chairpersons must be equipped with the ability to interpret data, use digital dashboards, interact with innovative governance platforms, and ensure information security and transparency in governance.

Fourth, training and capacity-building are essential components of the process of standardizing job positions and professionalizing grassroots leadership. Without specialized training programs tailored to the role of Ward People's Committee Chairpersons, the development of competency roadmaps, performance evaluations, and leadership planning at the ward level would face significant difficulties.

2.3. Current status of training and capacity-building for Ward People's Committee Chairpersons

At present, within the existing legal and policy framework, no training or capacity-building program has been formally and explicitly designed for Ward People's Committee Chairpersons. Instead, most available programs focus on imparting knowledge and skills in sectoral areas

administered by different ministries and agencies. This reflects a clear gap in developing ward leadership capacity - a group playing an increasingly critical role in the two-tier local government model and in sustainable urban development.

In practice, Ward People's Committee Chairpersons can attend capacity-building courses offered by institutions such as the Academy of Public Administration and Governance (APAG), the Academy of Construction Strategy and Cadres Training, provincial political schools, or staff training centers under the Department of Home Affairs or Department of Construction. Additionally, some localities organize short-term, thematic training sessions in which Ward People's Committee Chairpersons also participate.

According to the author's survey and synthesis, the content of these programs shows that they remain heavily focused on legal knowledge, public administration, and basic state management. In contrast, modules on sustainable urban development, modern urban governance, risk management, data-driven decision-making, digital transformation, and leadership are still minimal. Key topics, such as urban data governance, intersectoral coordination, transformational leadership, policy communication, or digital applications in management, have not been systematically incorporated or lack practical depth. Current programs also follow a "uniform" approach, without differentiation by job position, urban setting, or regional characteristics. This reduces their effectiveness and relevance, especially for Ward People's Committee Chairpersons whose capacity levels and local challenges vary significantly.

Training methods remain largely dominated by traditional methods, including lectures, note-taking, and end-of-course tests. Flexible formats such as online learning, blended learning, scenario-based simulations, project-based learning, or fieldwork are rarely applied, despite being more suitable for modern urban leadership training.

Furthermore, learning outcomes are still evaluated mainly through tests, written reports, or class attendance. There are no tools to measure the real-world application capacity, nor are there mechanisms to collect feedback from citizens, communities, or employing agencies.

The advantage of the current training system is that it has been widely implemented, creating opportunities for Ward People's Committee Chairpersons to participate. Some localities have made efforts to update training topics relevant to their local context, invite lecturers with both theoretical and practical expertise, and integrate technology in teaching activities. However, significant limitations remain: the absence of a competency framework tailored to Ward People's Committee Chairpersons, resulting in non-standardized curricula; outdated training content that does not fully address urban governance challenges; rigid teaching methods lacking interactivity; insufficient digital platforms to support lifelong learning; and a disconnect between training, evaluation, and cadre planning, which weakens incentives for genuine learning and reduces the effectiveness of local human resource deployment.

3. Requirements for training and capacity-building in the two-tier local government structure

According to Resolution No. 18-NQ/TW dated October 25, 2017, of the 12th Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam on continuing to streamline the political system for greater efficiency and effectiveness, the 11th Plenum of the 13th Central Committee adopted Resolution No. 60-NQ/TW on April 12, 2025, which introduced key reform directions for local government organization. Under this Resolution, the local government structure will be streamlined into two tiers: the provincial level (comprising provinces and centrally run cities) and the commune level (encompassing communes, wards, and special administrative units under the provincial level), with the abolition of the district level.

After the consolidation of administrative units, the country will have only 34 provincial-level units (28 provinces and six centrally-run cities). At the commune level, the total number of units will be drastically reduced from 10,035 to 3,321, comprising 2,621 communes, 687 wards, and 13 special administrative units. This transformation reflects a significant effort to streamline the administrative apparatus, moving toward a more efficient and modern government that adapts to the context of digital transformation.

This constitutes a profound institutional reform in Vietnam, one of the largest-scale administrative reforms, with comprehensive impacts on the organizational structure, functional decentralization, governance mechanisms, and the implementation capacity of local governments. The abolition of district-level units and the merger of commune-level units pose new demands on the management capacity, coordination ability, and leadership quality of local governments at the grassroots level.

The greatest challenge for training and capacity-building of Ward People's Committee Chairpersons today does not lie in the quality of specific programs but rather in the complete absence of an official, specialized, and tailor-made program for this position within the current policy system.

First, there is currently no program officially titled "Training and capacity-building for Ward People's Committee Chairpersons" issued by a competent authority. Even Decision No. 1090/QĐ-BNV dated December 19, 2019, of the Minister of Home Affairs - the only official document on commune-level cadre training - only sets out general provisions, without distinguishing by specific position. Likewise, Government Decree No. 171/2025/ND-CP dated June 30, 2025, though updated to reflect new contexts in civil service management, has yet to establish a dedicated framework or learning outcomes tailored to this role. As a result, training for Ward People's Committee Chairpersons remains integrated within generic

courses, lacking a basis for standardization, differentiation, or evaluation of effectiveness.

Second, the shift to a two-tier local government system has elevated the role of the Ward People's Committee Chairperson to one of critical importance. This position is no longer merely an administrative implementer but has become the "executive leader of urban areas." However, the current legal framework has yet to clearly define the competency requirements for this role or provide training guidelines that reflect its expanded functions and responsibilities.

Third, the current training system remains "one-size-fits-all" and lacks tailoring to the specific type of urban area, population size, or local characteristics. While the competencies, qualifications, and experience of Ward People's Committee Chairpersons vary widely across provinces and cities, the training content remains generic, lacking mechanisms to differentiate it by region or baseline capacity.

Fourth, there is no standardized competency framework for Ward People's Committee Chairpersons issued by an authorized agency. Such a framework is essential for determining training content, delivery methods, and assessment criteria. Without it, many localities struggle to design practical and relevant programs, while the lack of standardization undermines coherence between training, utilization, evaluation, and planning of grassroots leadership personnel.

Fifth, in the absence of an official training program, there is no systematic mechanism for evaluating, supervising, or providing feedback on the capacity-building of Ward People's Committee Chairpersons. This limits the ability to improve training content, methods, and long-term effectiveness.

In summary, the most significant challenge does not stem from the quality of existing training programs but from the institutional gap and lack of a specialized program tailored for Ward People's Committee Chairpersons. With the two-tier local government system now in place, and Ward People's Committee

Chairpersons assuming comprehensive leadership of urban areas, the development of a specialized training program based on a standardized competency framework is both urgent and foundational for the next stage of civil service reform.

4. Proposed solutions

Based on the analysis of the current situation, challenges, and requirements outlined above, the author proposes several groups of solutions to strengthen training and capacity-building for ward-level People's Committee Chairpersons under provincial authority, in order to meet the demands of sustainable urban development.

First, developing a standardized competency framework for ward-level People's Committee Chairpersons under provincial authority to meet the requirements of sustainable urban development. The competency framework should serve as the foundation for designing training content, methods, and evaluation criteria. It must be structured into three components: (1) Core competencies: strategic thinking, public service ethics, lifelong learning ability, and critical thinking; (2) Professional competencies: urban planning and architectural management, land management, public financial management, technical infrastructure and environmental management, climate change response, and innovative urban development; (3) Supporting competencies: public communication skills, community coordination, and the effective use of digital technology and data in decision-making. Each competency group should be specified with measurable indicators across three levels (basic, advanced, and specialized) to support entry assessment, learning pathway design, and evaluation of training effectiveness.

Second, designing a tiered training program. Based on the standardized competency framework, a stratified program should be developed that balances standard requirements with local specificities. Programs should be designed at three levels-basic,

advanced, and specialized-and differentiated according to urban characteristics (e.g., central wards, peri-urban wards, newly urbanized wards, or wards with unique geographical features). In addition, it is necessary to clearly identify specialized skill groups such as architectural planning management, construction management, technical infrastructure management, resource management, social management, technology management, and disaster risk management. Training content should emphasize: (1) foundational knowledge: laws, policies, and sustainable urban development concepts; (2) practical skills: case studies, simulation projects, and field activities; (3) innovation and technology: use of open data, digital service design, and digital transformation leadership.

Third, applying digital learning platforms and electronic competency portfolios. An online learning platform for Ward People's Committee Chairpersons should be created, offering modular courses aligned with each individual's position and career trajectory. The platform must store learning outcomes, assignments, certificates, and participant feedback while integrating with civil service records and public HR management software to ensure data interoperability. A critical feature should be the implementation of electronic competency portfolios, which enable updates on acquired skills, personalized learning recommendations based on career planning, and feedback tracking from the real-world application of knowledge.

Fourth, developing institutions specializing in training and capacity-building for sustainable urban management. Building a system of organizations dedicated to training officials in sustainable urban management should be considered a strategic, long-term solution. This requires: (1) establishing a network of specialized training providers at the national and provincial levels; (2) issuing a medium-and long-term training strategy aligned with local sustainable urban development goals; (3) mandating the

integration of digital technologies into training delivery and administration, diversifying learning modes, and ensuring continuous updates of essential skills and knowledge.

Fifth, linking training, evaluation, deployment, and workforce planning. The key is to create an organic link between training, capacity assessment, personnel deployment, and succession planning in a closed, coherent, and effective cycle. Each training program must include pre-, mid-, and post-training evaluations to measure progress and competency attainment. Learning results should be a key basis for task assignments, planning, and appointments. Feedback from practice, including input from subordinates, colleagues, and citizens, should also be integrated into evaluations. To ensure coherence, coordination between the Ministry of Home Affairs and provincial People's Committees must be established to facilitate data sharing and the integration of learning outcomes into personnel management. Forming this interconnected process between training, evaluation, and utilization will enhance the quality, relevance, and effectiveness of leadership development at the grassroots level.

5. Conclusion

Through a systematic analysis of the new requirements for training and capacity-building of Ward People's Committee Chairpersons in the context of Vietnam's two-tier local government model, it is evident that the institutional reforms introduced under Resolution No. 60-NQ/TW dated April 12, 2025, of the 13th Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam on reorganizing local government into a two-tier model and streamlining the administrative apparatus have reaffirmed the central role of Ward People's Committee Chairpersons. As heads of grassroots-level urban governments, they have become the key actors in implementing policies for sustainable urban development at the local level.

However, the current training system still faces significant shortcomings, including the absence of a standardized competency framework, training content that remains theoretical and detached from practical needs, slow innovation in teaching methods, and, most notably, the lack of integration between training, evaluation, deployment, and succession planning for officials. These limitations have prevented the training system from keeping pace with the requirements of modern public governance reform, reducing both the effectiveness and the strategic value of capacity-building programs.

In response, this paper proposes several fundamental and long-term solutions: developing a standardized competency framework, designing tiered programs tailored to local characteristics, applying digital learning platforms and electronic competency portfolios, establishing specialized training institutions, and creating a strong linkage between training, evaluation, and personnel management. These solutions not only address immediate needs but also lay a solid foundation for building a professional, capable, and future-oriented cadre of grassroots-level urban leaders in Vietnam's two-tier local government system.

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