PROJECT "IMPROVING ACCESS TO PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES FOR PEOPLE IN REMOTE AND ETHNIC MINORITY AREAS IN HA GIANG PROVINCE"

Project duration: 12/2022-11/2023

Lead agency for project implementation:
Ha Giang Department of Home Affairs

Support agencies for project implementation:
- Ha Giang Center for Public Admin Services
- People's Committee of Xin Man and Bac Quang District

Selected areas for project implementation:
- Tan Quang and Tan Lap communes in Bac Quang District
- Quang Nguyen and Nam Dan communes in Xin Man District

Technical and financial support:
- UNDP in Việt Nam
- The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) through Citizen-Powered Innovation Initiatives of PAPI Programme

10 ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES SELECTED FOR EXPERIMENTING ON DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT:

1. Birth certificate registration
2. Marriage certificate registration
3. Death certificate registration
4. Document notarization
5. Certification of poor, near-poor households
6. Certification of households escaped from poverty
7. Award to civilized/well-mannered family and community
8. 3 in 1 – registration of birth, registration of permanent residence, issuance of health insurance cards for children under 6 years old
9. 2 in 1 – registration of birth, issuance of health insurance cards for children under 6 years old
10. Implementation, adjustment, termination of monthly social allowance, financial support for care and alimentation

EXPECTED OUTPUTS:

- 10 administrative procedures implemented at commune level that will be simplified
- The capacity of the village digitalization support teams in four communes in Bac Quang and Xin Man District will be strengthened
- A “mobile services” model, supported by the village digitalization teams, operated and promoted in remote villages in four selected communes

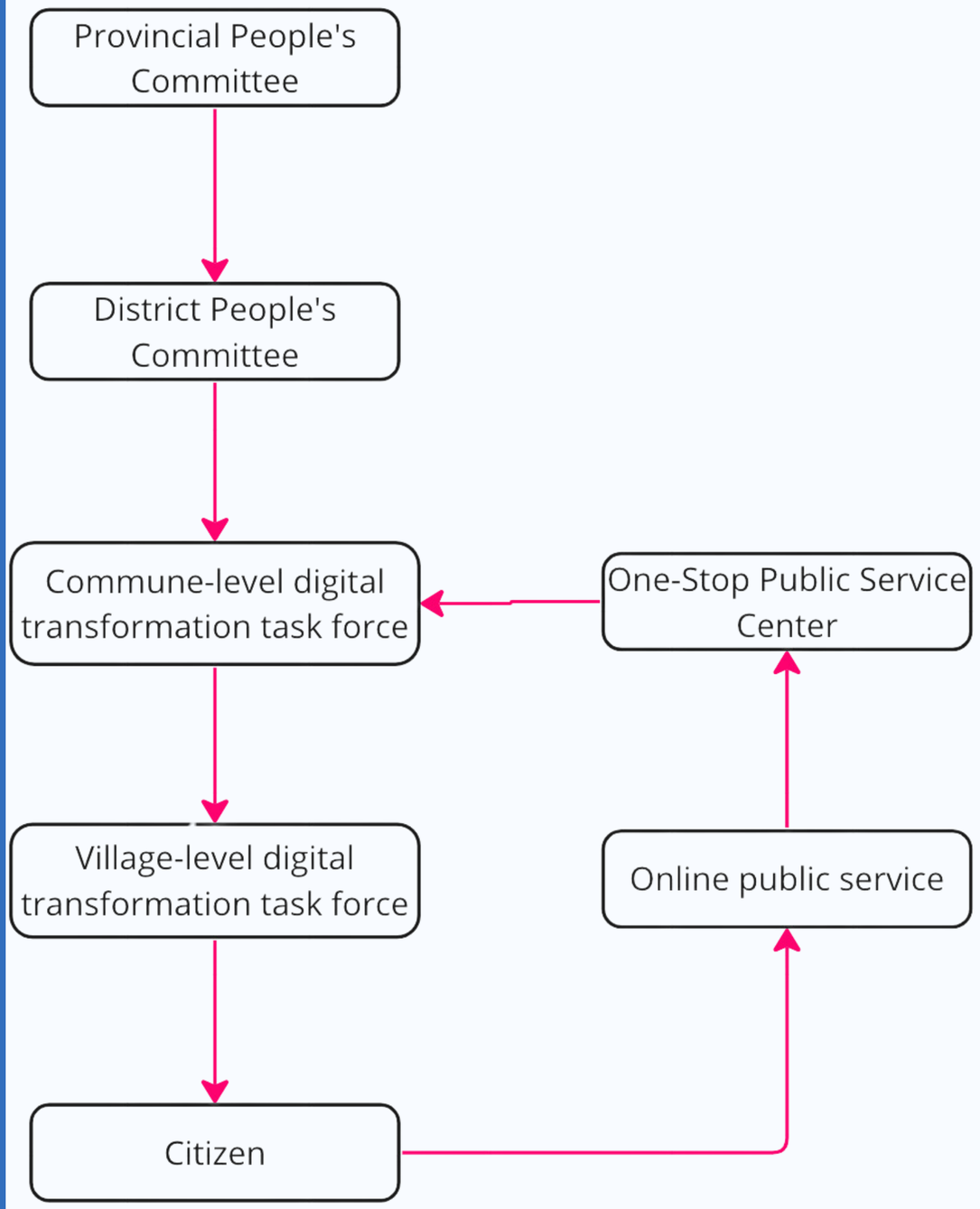
THE CURRENT STATUS OF ONLINE PUBLIC SERVICES AND THE DEPLOYMENT OF THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION TASK FORCE IN HA GIANG

Issues surrounding citizens, online public service portal, infrastructure, and village digitalization support team model.

1.0

Stakeholders

- Provincial People's Committee: Issuing a plan for implementing the village digitalization support team.
- District People's Committee: (No information available yet).
- Commune-level digital transformation task forces (steering committee): Directly overseeing village digitalization support teams at the village level.
- One-Stop Public Service Center: Processing applications. Depending on the locality, the one-stop center may also serve as a guide for citizens (e.g., in Tân Quang).



2.0

The current situation

To effectively access online public services as they are today, citizens need at a minimum:

1. A smartphone and the ability to use its features: Searching for information, entering texts, saving and uploading files, and understanding basic functions.
2. Internet connectivity.
3. Proficiency in reading and writing Vietnamese (visually impaired individuals need to be able to hear Vietnamese) and knowledge of the names of various types of documents.

2.0

The current situation

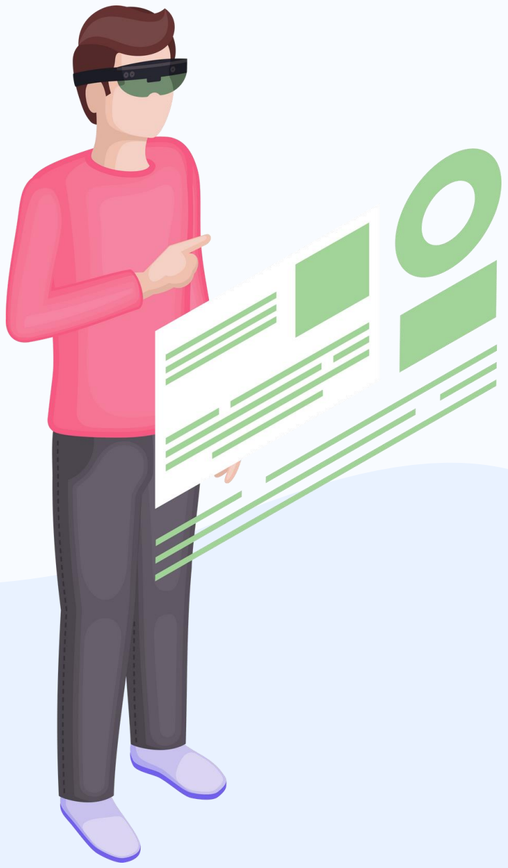
These factors contribute to making the enhancement and accessibility of online public services a complex issue with various challenges involving multiple stakeholders.

From different perspectives, different issues can be identified.

2.1

CITIZENS

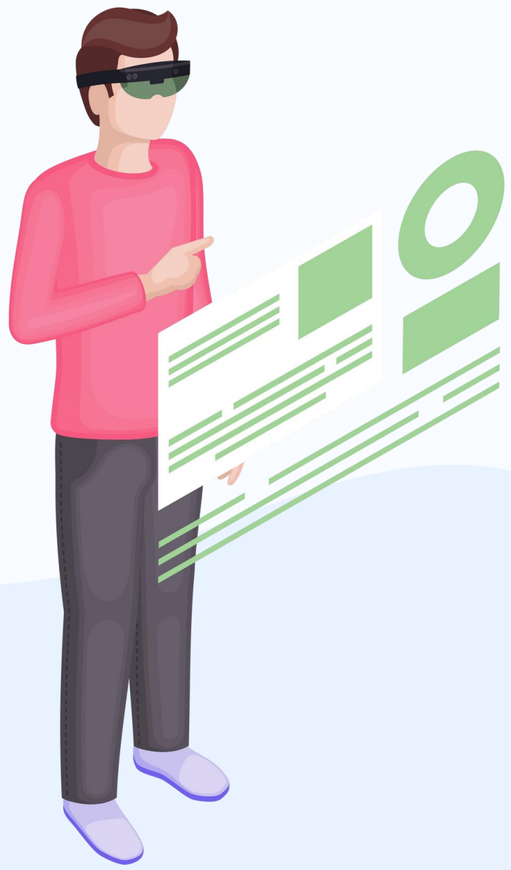
- In a group of over 100 participants involved in the village digitalization support team across 4 communes, approximately 20% of them have not registered their SIM cards.
- Around 80% of the participants lack the knowledge of how to search for and use the government portal. Those who are knowledgeable about its usage are primarily members of the physical one-stop service center, with only a few citizens who have had to go through online procedures multiple times before completing one.
- Roughly 10% of the participants do not own smartphones.



2.1

CITIZEN

- Common difficulties faced by participants when attempting to complete procedures include not knowing how to register, forgetting passwords, entering Captcha codes incorrectly, not knowing how to upload files, and being unable to locate buttons on the government portal.
- In the 4 communes where the program is implemented, only 20-40% of the citizens are proficient in using Vietnamese, as shared by members of the village digitalization support team.
- As a result, for some groups of citizens, performing online procedures is currently not feasible. For example, citizens who lack the necessary devices would need to acquire smartphones or computers before they can participate in online procedures.

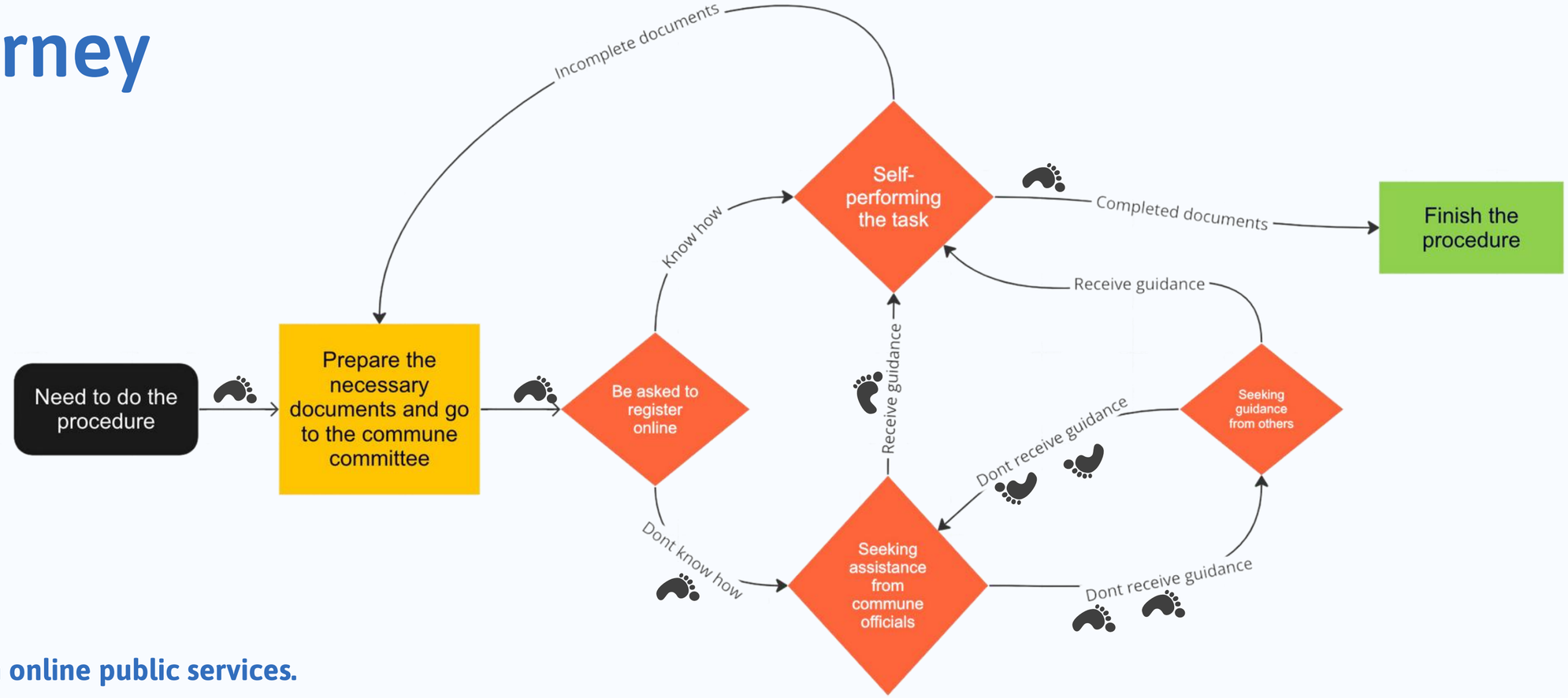


Citizen journey

I want to authenticate my child's birth certificate for school enrollment.

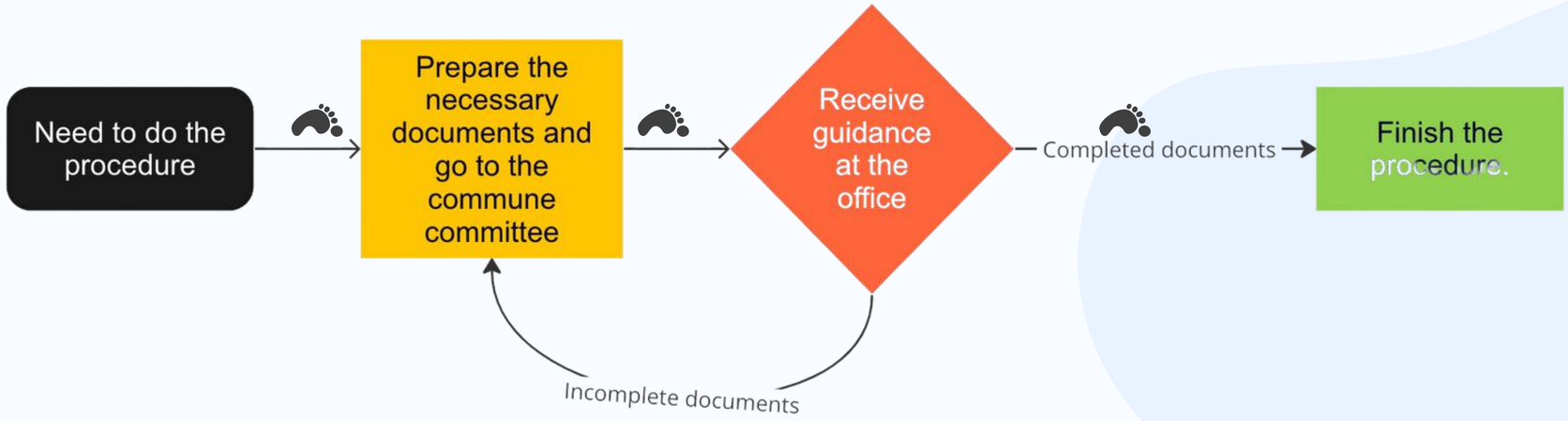
Mrs A

With online public services.



Without online public services.

Because I belong to an ethnic minority, I am not familiar with the process.



2.2

INFRASTRUCTURE

Electricity and internet

According to the feedback from the village digitalization support team members in various villages:

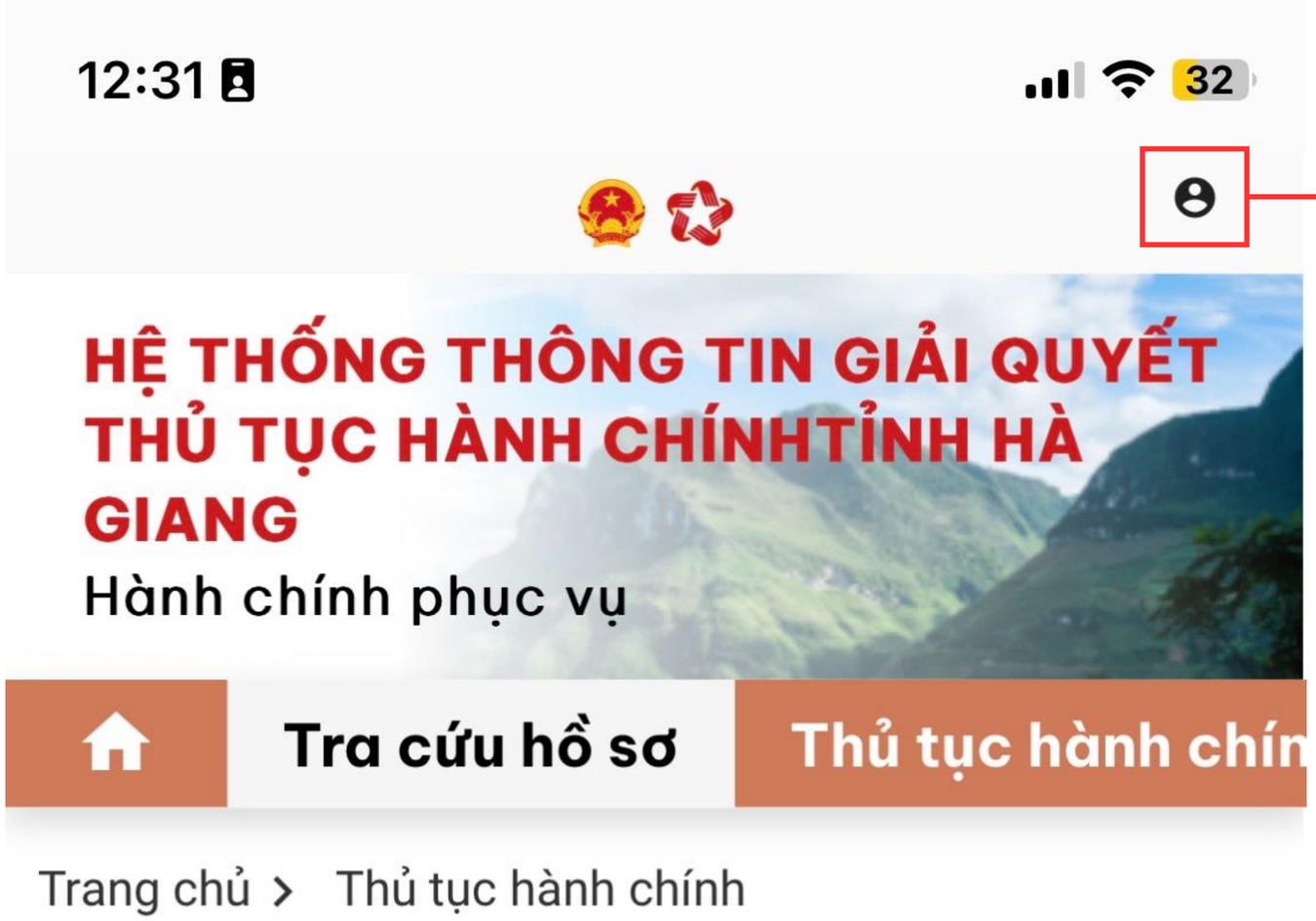
- some areas in the region lack internet connectivity and do not have 4G signal.
- A few areas still do not have access to electricity.
- Three out of four communes have challenging terrain.

Online public service portal

The online service portal itself is not user-friendly, and the steps for logging in and using it are still complex for citizens. Furthermore, technical glitches with the portal make it even more challenging for citizens to access.
For instance, the portal is slow, clicking on the login button does not progress to the next step, and so on.

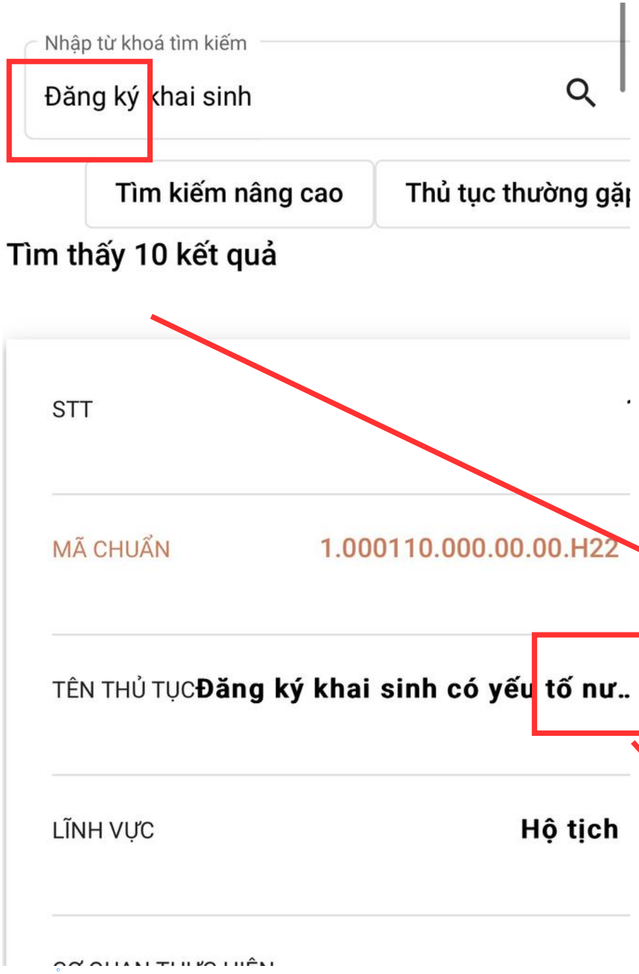
➢ Therefore, improving access to e-services for citizens involves not only bringing online public services to their doorstep but also enhancing these services to make them more user-friendly.

Examples of difficulties that citizens face when interacting with the portal on a mobile interface



Citizens are unaware of where to click to log in.

Examples of difficulties that citizens face when interacting with the portal on a mobile interface



For citizens who do not know the exact name of the procedure, with just one incorrect character in the search, they can not find the desired procedure.

Hidden texts can lead to citizens not knowing which procedure to select.

2.1

VILLAGE DIGITALIZATION SUPPORT TEAMS (VDST)

- The village digitalization support teams (VDSTs) operate periodically, depending on top-down plans. Their activities are not consistent and primarily involve propaganda work.

- The VDST in each village consists of 4 to 6 members and may hold meetings or briefings once or twice per month. During these meetings, general village issues are discussed alongside digital transformation, mainly because most members are engaged in various other areas. The team members communicate with each other via Zalo groups.

- Members of the VDSTs are between 24 and 72 years old. The youth in the villages are potential members, but most of them work outside their home villages.

- On average, each commune has 8 to 12 VDSTs, with one team per village. However, the role of these teams also varies from commune to commune. For example, in Tân Quang commune, where the terrain is easy to traverse, and there are not many administrative records, commune officials are the main guides for citizens, and there is less need for the VDSTs to participate in implementing online public services.

2.1

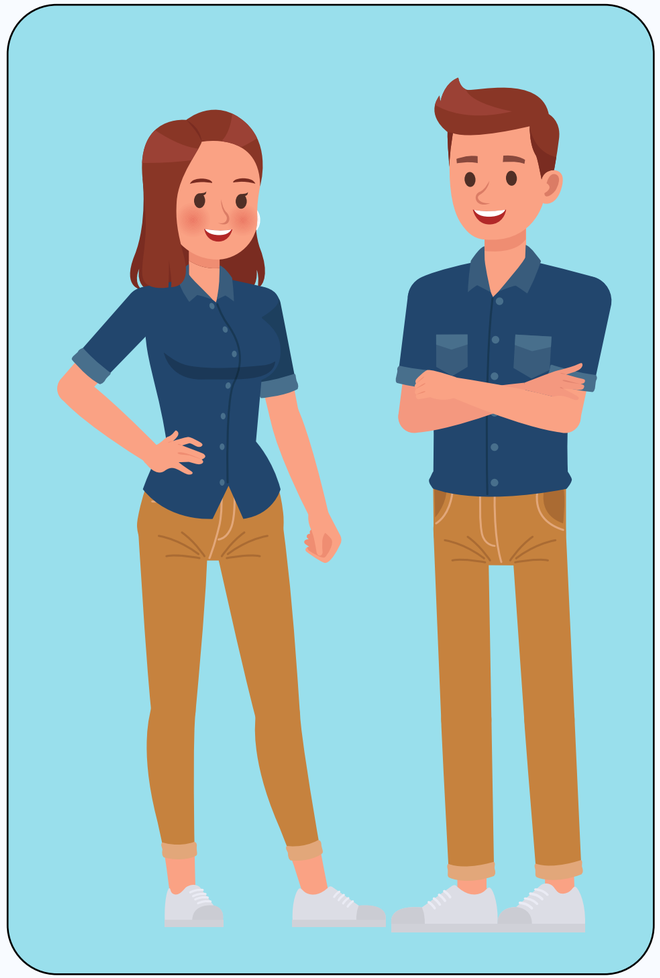
VILLAGE DIGITALIZATION SUPPORT TEAMS (VDST)

- The activities of the task forces are organized by the commune based on the guidelines from the Hà Giang Provincial Information and Communications Department, and key members include the police officer and the village chief. The task forces report to the commune's digital transformation steering committee, which includes the digital transformation leadership at the commune level.

- There is no budget allocated for the task forces' activities. Members of the task forces in the villages receive allowances as per the provincial People's Council resolution (300,000 VND/month) but do not receive salaries.

- Regarding human resources, the one-stop service center at the commune level is currently understaffed. If there were dedicated task forces at the commune level with sufficient personnel, citizens coming to the commune for procedures would be guided.

MEMBERS OF THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION TASK FORCE.



Basic Information:

- Members come from various ethnic backgrounds: Kinh, Dao, Tày, Mông, Pà Thẻn.
- There are two age groups, one ranging from 24 to 38 years old and the other from 54 to 71 years old.
- All 12 interviewees have primary occupations in addition to their work in the village or commune. Examples include farming, taxi driving, printing, and sales.
- 11 out of 12 interviewees are married, with 7 of them having young children.
- The distance from the members' homes to the commune People's Committee office ranges from approximately 1 km to 4 km.
- Members have varying lengths of service in the village or commune, ranging from 1 year to over 20 years.

Challenges:

- Difficulties in transportation within the village.
- Lack of financial support or limited financial assistance compared to transportation costs.
- Possible resistance from some citizens.
- Lack of familiarity with online public services, confusion in navigating the system, slow system processing, or technical errors.
- Busy schedules due to multiple commitments.
- Low digital literacy among citizens, making guidance more challenging.

-> It's essential to emphasize the need for a mindset shift towards providing services that are suitable for citizens, rather than assessing citizens' capabilities as inadequate for using online services. The focus should be on improving service accessibility and usability for all citizens.

Objectives/Motivations:

Members aged 24 to 38 (8 people):
- Eager to contribute their youth and help citizens make procedures easier
- Motivated by the responsibility placed upon them when elected.
- Find joy in being part of the team and value the trust placed in them by citizens and local authorities.

Members aged 54 to 71 (3 people):
- Some wish to retire (2 out of 3).
- Motivated by their sense of responsibility towards citizens.

-> It appears that there is a need to better align roles with the motivations and capabilities of the members within the village digitalization support team. Alternatively, considering individuals who are more suitable (both in terms of willingness and capability) could be an option if there is a mismatch.

Ways the project can provide support/collaborate:

- Continued Training and Workshops: Continue organizing training and workshops for task force members and citizens. Schedule them on weekends or during non-agricultural busy seasons to ensure maximum participation.

- Software Upgrades: Invest in upgrading the software to improve processing speed and overall efficiency, making it more user-friendly for both task force members and citizens.

EXAMPLES OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION TASK FORCE MEMBERS

Normally, I have to take my child to school and feed the buffalo, but on days like these, I wake up earlier, take the buffalo up the hill, tie it, and then head down to the commune for digital transformation tasks.

- Ms. D - Member of the Village Digitalization Support Team

Basic Information:

- Ethnicity: Dao
- Age: 30-35
- Main Occupation: Farming
- Family: Married with small children
- Address: Approximately 4km away from the commune People's Committee office (mountainous terrain)
- Experience: Has not previously engaged in online procedures but has experience with online payments.

Challenges:

- Balancing responsibilities between the digital transformation team and the village healthcare group, which involves tasks related to births, deaths, and vaccination campaigns.
- Difficulty in transportation within the village, with limited financial support for travel expenses despite receiving 745,000 VND when participating in the village healthcare group and 300,000 VND when joining the digital transformation team.
- Challenging terrain with households located deep in the forest, requiring traversing multiple hills to reach a single household.
- Having only one motorcycle for the family, which creates logistical challenges when both spouses have simultaneous commitments.
- Resistance or lack of understanding from community during training sessions, resulting in negative interactions.

Objective/Motivation

- I hope that everything improves to better support the people.
- I don't see this as a burden; I feel happy to be elected into the team. My motivation for participating is my responsibility to the people because I have been chosen.

Ways the project can provide support/collaborate:

- I find the current activities valuable.
- I need more support in improving skills for using software and equipment.

SUGGESTION FROM THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION TASK FORCES DURING THE TRAINING SESSIONS

Activities they wish to undertake	Support they need
• Organize similar training sessions in the village for young participants, enabling them to continue guiding others.	• Additional videos/brochures are needed for distribution to provide guidance. • Training sessions should involve younger members within the village, not just village leaders or deputies. Families with young individuals should nominate participants who can apply the knowledge gained within their households. • Provide 1-2 computers per village and 1-2 projector sets per commune for shared use during training sessions.
• Assisting citizens with simple procedures, providing on-site guidance to those with devices. • Assisting citizens in setting up their electronic identities. • Supporting citizens with simple procedures as taught in the recent training sessions.	• Tablets, smartphones, and internet connectivity are essential tools. Smartphones are necessary for convenience and efficiency. • Financial support for transportation expenses is required. • More training to better understand the steps in the online procedure. • Citizens must have their verified phone number, a smartphone, and an ID card.
• Assisting citizens in registering Zalo accounts and creating Zalo groups for sharing and communication. • Supporting citizens in integrating their health insurance and driver's license for more convenient use.	

3.0

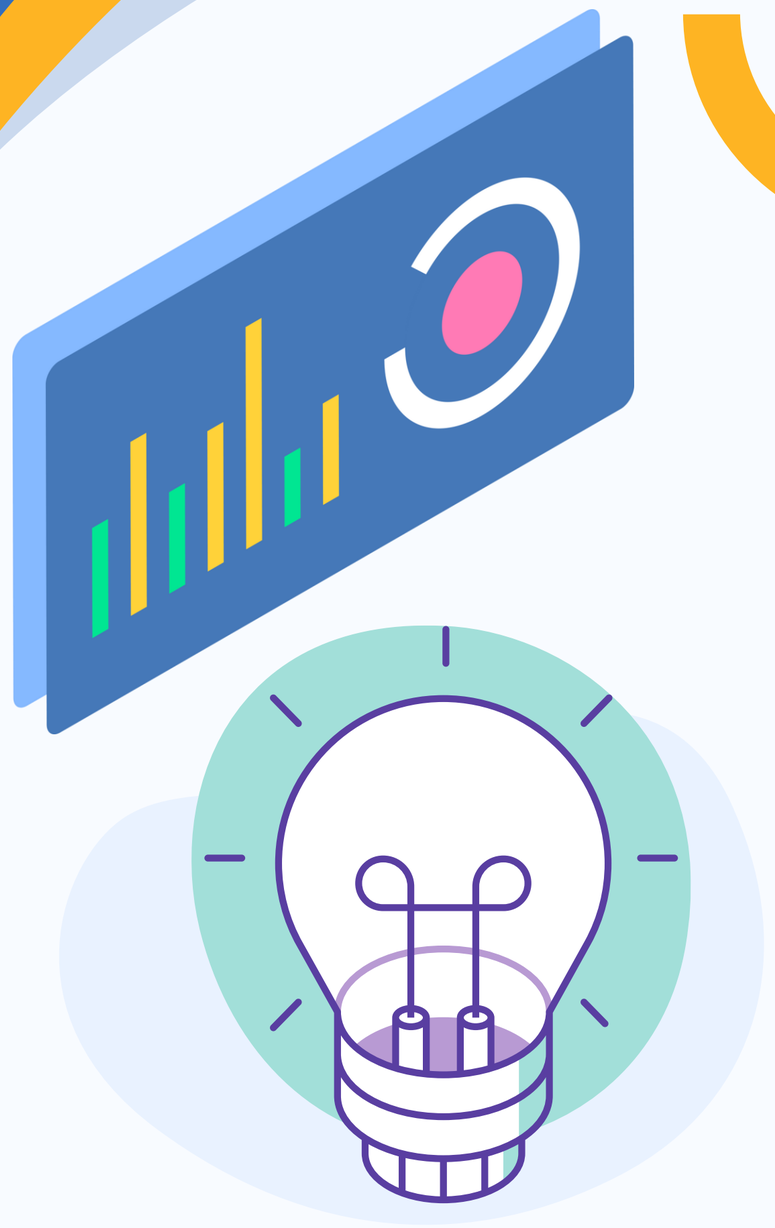
ASSUMPTIONS AND TESTING

Issues & Assumptions:
(1) Citizens have not been able to access online public services because they lack guidance, or lack the necessary devices.
(2) Citizens have not been able to access online public services due to complex and difficult-to-use features.

Hypotheses:
H1: If online public services are brought closer to citizens' homes, and those who don't know how to use them are guided, more citizens will be able to access online public services.
H2: If the design of the online public service portal is more user-friendly, citizens will find it easier to access online public services.

(Expected outcomes: Increase in the proportion of online applications, an increase in the proportion of self-service usage).

Plan:
(1) Implement the guidance activities of the village digitalization support team. Run pilot tests and measurements for one month.
(2) Implement the upgrade of the online public service portal design. Run pilot tests and measurements for one month.



3.1

INITIAL RESULTS

a. Regarding the online public service portal:

- The online public service portal is now capable of processing online applications for 9 tested procedures. 9 out of 10 interviewed citizens mentioned the benefits they see when submitting applications online and expressed their willingness to use online services in the future. 6 out of 10 citizens expressed a desire to introduce online procedures to their relatives and friends.
- However, there are still many technical and accessibility-related issues for citizens. Based on observations during the testing phase, most citizens (14 out of 16 observed) cannot perform procedures independently without guidance and support from the village digitalization support team (VDST). 5 out of 10 interviewees shared that they need guidance to complete the procedures.
- Some technical system errors also hinder the community VDST from addressing certain issues effectively.

3.1

INITIAL RESULTS

b. Regarding the VDSTs:

- The testing demonstrates that implementing a VDST to support citizens in using online public services is feasible and necessary. Since most citizens cannot currently complete procedures independently and require assistance, this approach proves valuable. Actual measurement of the time taken by citizens trying to use the service on their own took up to 40 minutes without completing the procedure. However, under the guidance of the VDST, citizens can complete procedures in an average of about 20 minutes.

- In Nấm Dẩn commune: Overall, members of the VDST provide guidance to citizens. However, they have not demonstrated proactiveness and proficiency in assisting citizens.

- In Quảng Nguyên commune: Members of the VDST provide fast and proficient assistance to citizens, clearly showing their experience and understanding of the online portal. However, there are still some skills that the task force members are not proficient in, such as document scanning and file saving.

- In Tân Quang commune: The VDST has shown significant improvement compared to the initial training observation. The composition of members has changed to include individuals with a better understanding of procedures. Task force members guide citizens quickly, proficiently, and professionally, demonstrating great persistence even when citizens face difficulties."

3.1

INITIAL RESULTS

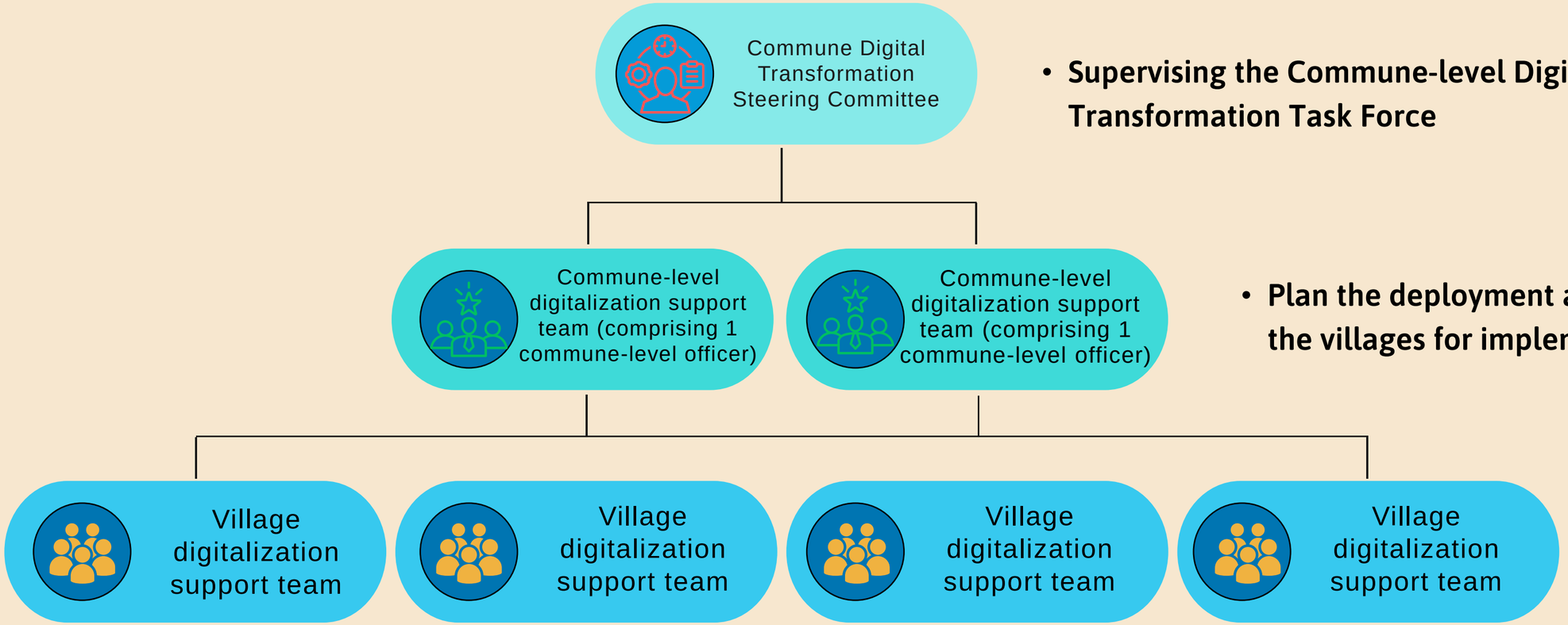
b. Regarding the VDSTs:

- With the spirit of experimentation and improvement, commune leaders have quickly adjusted the operational model of VDSTs to make it more efficient and aligned with the actual situation.

A TYPICAL OPERATING MODEL IN TÂN QUANG COMMUNE

Before the experiment	Changes after the experiment
1. Members: • The main members of VDSTs are village chiefs and local police officers selected based on their positions at the local level rather than their practical abilities. Many officials are not proficient in using technology devices, hence they encounter difficulties when participating in training and getting familiar with online public services	1. Members: • Changing the roles of members, those who are not proficient in using online public services take charge of promotional activities. Adding new members who are more tech-savvy (such as young people and local teachers), these members will provide direct guidance to the citizen.
2. Operation: • The areas were divided among 2 commune-level digitalization support team based on geographical locations. Each team is responsible for neighboring areas, but due to the varying population in each area, the needs of the residents also differ. The workload is not evenly distributed between the teams. • Regular guiding sessions were organized, but at the time of these activities, residents did not have the need.	2. Operation: • Divide the working areas for 2 commune-level digitalization support team according to the population. Therefore, the workload is more balanced between teams, ensuring effective operations. • The communes announced the list of members of the VDSTs with contact information to the citizens. When citizens have a need, they can contact a member of the VDSTs and receive support at home.

A TYPICAL OPERATING MODEL IN TÂN QUANG COMMUNE



- **Supervising the Commune-level Digital Transformation Task Force**
- **Plan the deployment and connect with the villages for implementation.**
- **Assist the Commune-level digitalization support team when organizing activities in their village, and at the same time, provide guidance to the residents in their vicinity.**

NEXT STEPS

Continuing the implementation and improvement of the village digitalization support team model. 01

Improve the design and features of the online public service portal. 02

IMPLEMENTING TEAM

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