



Governance and Participation

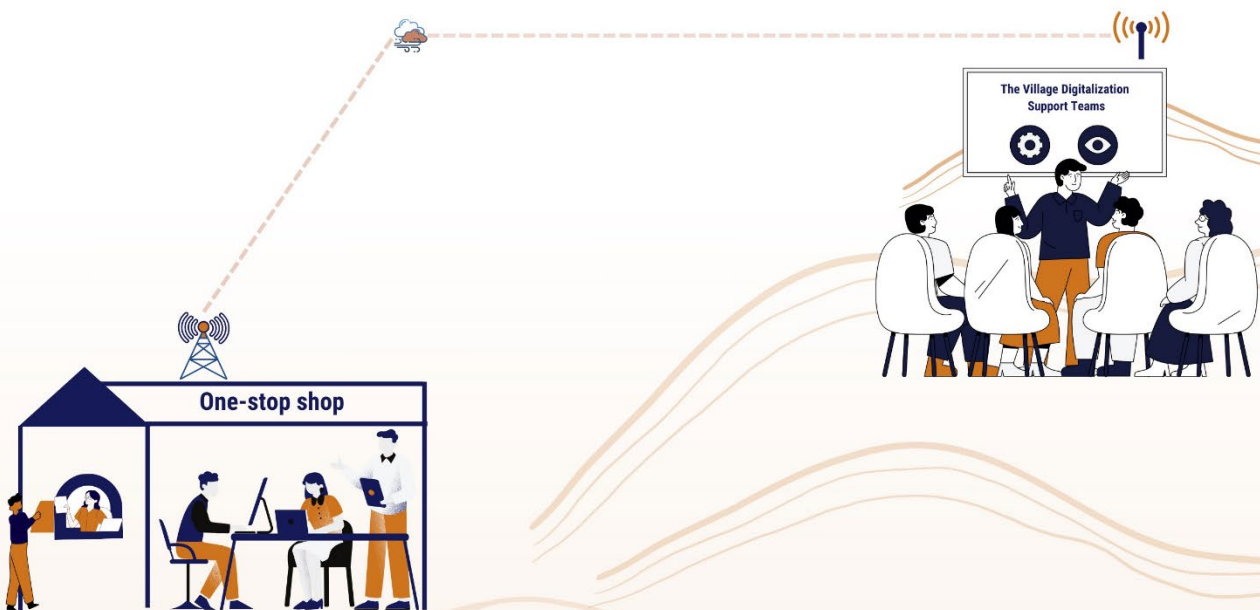
A Series of Policy Discussion Papers

Advisory Report on Improving the Provision of Online Public Administrative Services in Ninh Thuan Province

Towards leaving no one behind in the process of developing e-government and digital government in provinces with large ethnic minority populations

Two public administrative services under study

- (1) Issuance of marriage status confirmation certificates
- (2) The “3-in-1” administrative service for a birth certificate, a health insurance card, permanent residency registration, and an identity number for children under 6 years old



Ha Noi, October 2023

The series of Governance and Participation Policy Discussion Papers is commissioned by the Governance and Participation Team at UNDP in Viet Nam.

The series aims to analyse trends in Viet Nam regarding the implementation processes and options in specific public administration reform areas. In order to confront the social, economic, political and environmental challenges facing Viet Nam, policymakers need to adopt evidence-based decision-making. These policy papers aim to contribute to current policy debate by providing discussion inputs on policy reforms – thereby helping to improve Viet Nam’s development efforts.

Three principles guide the production of the policy discussion papers: (i) evidence-based research, (ii) academic rigour and independence of analysis, and (iii) social legitimacy and a participatory process. This involves a substantive research approach with a rigorous and systematic identification of policy options on key public administration reform and anti-corruption issues.

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ABBREVIATIONS

DTI	Digital Transformation Index
PAPI	The Viet Nam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index
PAR-Index	Public Administration Reform Index
SIPAS	Satisfaction Index of Public Administrative Services
UNDP	United Nations Development Program

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Ireland



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This section summarizes the research conducted in Ninh Thuan province, focusing on identifying the current situation, determining the influencing factors and proposing solutions to enhance accessibility and the effective utilization of online public services in Ninh Thuan – is a province in the South-Central Coast region with a large number of ethnic minorities. The research was carried out during September to October 2023, through an in-depth study of two administrative procedures: (1) Issuance of marital status certificate and (2) Interconnected procedures for childbirth registration, permanent residence, and health insurance card issuance for children under 6 years old (the 3-in-1 procedures). Field surveys were undertaken in 4 communes within the Thuan Nam and Bac Ai districts, encompassing 1 commune from region II and 3 communes from region III.

1. CURRENT SITUATION

1.1. Overview of the situation of online public services provision in Ninh Thuan province

According to the Ninh Thuan Department of Information and Communication's report, while local conditions still have many financial difficulties, the province is also interested in investing in infrastructure for online public services and digital transformation.

By 2023, mobile infrastructure has covered 98,56% of communes/wards, villages/groups and is guaranteed to serve the Ninh Thuan's digital transformation. The province boasts total 693,143 telephone subscribers, achieving a subscriber density of 116.3/100 people. Up to now, the whole province has 288/289 villages (99.6%) that have fibre optic infrastructure to serve households. Currently, Ma Lam village in Phuoc Tan commune, Bac Ai district does not have infrastructure and telecommunications businesses are implementing the construction of service provision infrastructure in 2023.

Fixed broadband infrastructure has covered 100% of communes/wards and ensuring to serve the digital transformation of Ninh Thuan province. The province has total 342,444 broadband internet subscribers (86,078 fixed broadband and 256,366 mobile broadband subscribers). The internet density in the province stands at 98.2 subscribers/100 people.

According to Ninh Thuan's Department of Information and Communications report, by 2023, the status of 812/829 public services has been synchronized to the National Public Service Portal reaching 97.95%; integrated into the National Public Service Portal 812/829 achieving 97.95%. From 01/01/2023 to 07/09/2023, the whole province received 275,423 dossiers, of which 43,655 dossiers received directly, accounting for 15.85%, 231,562 dossiers received online, making up 84%, 06%, 206 applications received via public postal service constituted 0.01%.

- Birth registration has 5,151 records (610 records in person, 4,541 records online);
- Death registration has 2,256 records (228 records in person, 2,028 records online);
- Connected administrative procedures for birth registration, permanent residence registration, and issuance of health insurance cards for children under 6 years old have 809 records (22 records in person, 787 records online).

1.2. Main Research Findings on the two administrative procedures in Ninh Thuan Province

1.2.1. Procedures

To execute online public services through the "3 in 1" procedure on the national service portal, individuals are required to register an account, possess an official SIM card and install a level 2 electronic identification code (VneID) to get the authentication code OTP registration information, bank account.

When carried out on the Public Service Portal of Ninh Thuan province, people must download the declaration form because there is no online declaration form and attach photocopies of supporting documents.

The workload of justice and civil status officials increases due to the necessity of concurrently using different software, as the data lacks interconnectedness. Furthermore, civil servants are compelled to assist individuals in form submission and declarations, particularly because ethnic minorities exhibit variations in educational levels.

1.2.2. Human Resources

a. Government Officials:

- Basically, party committees and leaders of surveyed districts and communes are all aware of the importance of digital transformation and providing online public services to civilians. However, there are still many leaders and managers who still possess an incomplete understanding of digital transformation, online public services. They do not understand the requirements of providing online public services' information appropriate to the locality they manage, resulting in a degree of ambiguity in directing the implementation process.

- Justice and civil status officers, as well as one-stop departments in the study area are generally proficient in their work and firmly grasp the implementation process. The number of justice-civil status officers, "one-stop shop" departments, and people with information technology (IT) skills is limited, often comprising only 1 to 2 individuals.

b. Citizens:

- Ninh Thuan has a high proportion of ethnic minority population, low educational level and challenging economic circumstances, the rate of poor and near-poor households in the study area remains notably high, typically Bac Ai district being particularly disadvantaged within Ninh Thuan province. The rate of people owning phones/smartphones, having internet access and the rate of literate in Vietnamese still quite low (limited to basic listening and understanding Vietnamese). Therefore, access to and utilization of online public services by local residents, especially ethnic minorities, remains limited.

People continue to adhere to the traditional mindset of seeking reassurance by personally visiting the commune headquarters when administrative procedures arise. Therefore, the adoption of public services is still relatively novel among the local population.

c. Community Digital Technology Team:

- Ninh Thuan province has established 2,439 community digital technology groups. Members of the Community Digital Technology group at the commune level, including Chairman of the

commune, front, and union; At the village level, there are secretaries/village heads (team leaders), unions, village associations, teachers, etc.

- The primary role of these community groups is to disseminate information and encourage the population to engage in traditional services. However, their capacity to support and guide people in utilizing public services remains limited, primarily because the members of these groups lack smartphones, have incomplete knowledge of procedures, and are unfamiliar with application software operations.

1.2.3. Infrastructure:

- Equipment and machinery at the One-Stop Department have primarily been provided since 2015, and are frequently faulty and slow, adversely affecting the delivery of online public services at the One-Stop Department. The monthly subscription payment for communes is about 300,000 VND/month - equivalent to the usage level of a household.

- The interface of the province's Public Service Portal lacks user-friendly, there are no instructions in video, audio, or ethnic languages. Essential public services are not displayed or suggested on the home page. The process of implementing public services remains relatively complicated compared to the level of people (especially many people with low education and ethnic minorities). The portal has not yet applied voice reception tools in searching; and there are no brief instructional videos featuring ethnic minority languages accessible at the Commune-level Reception and Result Return Department (one-stop department), where a significant portion of ethnic minorities reside.

- The civil status software and the software from the Ministry of Public Security occasionally exhibit instability and encounter issues that disrupt the execution of relevant procedures. Data transmission lines often experience disconnections or overloads during office hours or at the close of the working day, when agencies are simultaneously uploading files and documents to the district's centralized system. Meanwhile, the data storage system has not received adequate attention.

- Interconnection and data connection between central and local Online Public Service delivery systems, between ministries and departments have not been fully implemented, for example, Software of the Ministry of Public Security and Civil Status Software of the Ministry of Justice.

2. ASSESSMENTS

2.1. Legal and Policy Framework

- The legal framework and policy concerning administrative procedures lacks synchronization and exhibits instances of overlap, leading to challenges in the implementation of online public services, particularly regarding regulations related to recording civil status records.

- The process of implementing online public services is still quite intricate, with many steps causing civil servants and the public to encounter many difficulties in implementing, especially public services levels 3 and 4.

- Assigning targets to districts and communes on the number of online documents for the entire process, resulting in a significant portion of these transactions being handled by Commune Committees to assist individuals. This is also the reason that creates additional pressure on civil servants during the initial phases of public service provision.

2.2. Educational level and economic conditions of the citizens.

- The residents of Ninh Thuan face ongoing economic hardships, and educational attainment varies widely. Access to IT equipment is limited, with many lacking internet connectivity, computers, or smart mobile devices. Additionally, a substantial portion of the population does not perceive the benefits and necessity of utilizing online public services and remains hesitant when considering their implementation. Respondents express a preference for direct interactions with government agencies and "commune headquarters" to receive guidance on administrative procedures, as it provides them with a sense of reassurance

2.3. Capacity and Work Motivation of Civil Servants

- Some basic justice and civil status officials are still confused and not proficient in using and manipulating software and machinery to support the implementation of online public service, especially when the infrastructure and machinery fail to meet the requirements. Arranging personnel with deep expertise, specialized in information technology, computer science, and data science at the commune level during the digital transformation process is also not possible due to regulations on streamlining the apparatus. .

- Low salary, lack of benefits and lack of other incentives while workload increases and unsatisfactory working conditions (lack of suitable machinery and equipment) contribute to significant pressure and reduced motivation among civil servants (especially at the commune level), when it comes to providing online public services to the public.

2.4. Digital Infrastructure

- Individuals seeking to access online public services must possess a smartphone or computer, register the SIM card owner's information, install a level 2 identification code (VNeID) (mandatory "for 3 in 1" interconnection procedures), and secure an internet connection. Meanwhile, the proportion of people in the research area with smartphones and internet connectivity remains quite low and people have the habit of using junk SIMs and if they have registered genuine SIMs but rarely use them, they will be fined one-way lock.

- The coordination and sharing mechanism among ministries and departments in the surveying and development of software solutions and application platforms (such as Police, Justice, and Insurance) still exhibit several shortcomings. The digitization of documents progresses slowly, resulting in an incomplete national population database that does not allow data verification, comparison, or extraction.

- Bandwidth capacity and internet subscription lines remain limited, failing to ensure the effective provision of online public services, particularly in remote mountainous communes. Economic conditions are challenging, especially among people in remote areas, where terminal equipment is scarce.

- Equipment and machinery in the "One-Stop" department fall short of the requirements for efficient online public service implementation. Outdated equipment, coupled with slow internet connections, diminish the efficacy of online public service provision, resulting in time loss for both civil servants and the public.

2.5. Economic Conditions and Local Investment Levels

Ninh Thuan province continues to grapple with economic challenges, with insufficient budget allocations for equipment modernization, basic infrastructure development, and ensuring incentives for civil servants to enhance the quality of online public services.

3. PROPOSAL SOLUTIONS TO NINH THUAN PROVINCE

3.1. Proposal to Ninh Thuan Provincial People's Committee

- The digital transformation strategy for Ninh Thuan Province should outline a clear roadmap, objectives, and specific steps that align with the province's unique conditions and characteristics. Emphasize a comprehensive, people-centric approach when developing policies to ensure that all people, groups, subjects, and ages are taken care of (especially ethnic minorities), ensuring that no one leaving behind in the digital transformation process, towards inclusive and sustainable development.

- Maintain both online and in-person public services; Do not follow the results of online reports, misjudge reality and thereby build unfeasible policies.

- Organize monitoring and evaluation (hire experts to experience and independently evaluate) the province's process of providing online public services' information at all levels, pointing out limitations and inadequacies in aspects of procedures, people and technological infrastructure, from which there is a basis for making appropriate adjustments to local conditions.

- Integrate resources of National Target Programs in supporting investment in infrastructure, investment in human resources to raise people's awareness, and create conditions for people to access and use online public services. Mobilize socialization resources from businesses and investors in the province to support IT equipment for poor communes with many difficulties and ethnic minorities.

3.2. Proposed solutions for relevant local government agencies

3.2.1. Completing the legal framework, policies, and administrative procedures

- Review and propose amendments to outdated regulations, overlapping, causing difficulties in implementing online public services; Review, reduce and simplify administrative procedures regulations.

- Complete the process of providing information services.

- Strengthen supervision of the implementation of online public administrative procedure.

- Allocating targets for providing online public services should be based on the actual conditions of each locality to avoid creating competitive pressure, leading to "achievement disease".

3.2.2. Improving Civil Servants' Capacity, Work Regimen, and Motivation

- Enhance the role and responsibility of leaders in the digital transformation process and providing online public services' information to the people.

- Review and evaluate the situation of resolving administrative procedures to arrange and allocate personnel in a reasonable and effective manner based on transaction frequency and workload at the "One-Stop" Department at district and commune levels. Research the rotation arrangement and increase of specialized personnel in information technology, digital transformation

combined with administrative procedure control positions at the "one-stop" department in communes/wards.

- Pilot socialization and outsourcing of work such as supporting the supply of informational services, guiding the use of informational services at commune and district levels instead of recruiting new personnel.

3.2.3. Propagating and raising public's awareness about Online Public Services and Digital Transformation

- Raise people's awareness through various forms of propaganda, suitable to people's culture and beliefs, transforming the implementation of online public services.

- Comprehensive survey and assessment of the Community Digital Technology Group's organization and operational efficiency in Ninh Thuan Province. Based on this, propose policies to further enhance the role of community digital technology groups.

- Department of Information and Communications surveys, studies, and organizes a pilot model for handling mobile online administrative procedures in remote mountainous communes (following the model of Ha Giang).

3.2.4. Investing in digital infrastructure construction

- All levels of government from provincial to commune level need to have a mechanism to review, maintain, upgrade, and purchase new equipment to improve the productivity of administrative management and provision of online public services across the province, especially at commune level and remote mountainous localities.

- Upgrade Ninh Thuan Provincial Public Service Portal to simplify and user-friendly; Adding voice reception tools to look up procedures on the province's DVC Portal; create and broadcast short instructional videos with ethnic minority voices at the commune-level "one-stop" department in places where the majority of ethnic minorities live.

- Accelerate database construction and connect, synchronize data with software from the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Public Security to serve the comparison, verification and extraction of data, thereby reducing pressure and processing time. handle documents for civil servants on duty at the "one-stop shops".

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, public administration in countries around the world has had many changes towards modernity, professionalism, effectiveness and efficiency. The achievements of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, especially in the field of digital technology, have brought opportunities for countries to build electronic government, aiming to better serve citizens.

The Vietnamese Party and State soon recognized the potential for the country's development in the Fourth Industrial Revolution and identified the advancement of digital government as a pivotal component in this progress. Several policies were introduced to achieve the objective of establishing a digital government, digital economy, and digital society such as Resolution No. 52-NQ/TW, dated September 27, 2019, of the Politburo on "*Some guidelines and policies to proactively participate in the Fourth Industrial Revolution*", E-Government Development Strategy towards Digital Government for the period 2021 - 2025; National strategy for developing the digital economy and digital society to 2025, with a vision to 2030. However, to clearly understand the causes of those results, an in-depth, empirical study of factors affecting the results of that policy implementation.

Ninh Thuan is the gateway province connecting the Southeast key economic region with the Southern Central Highlands and South-Central provinces. In recent years, Ninh Thuan has made great efforts to reform administrative procedures, creating an open and transparent business environment. Provincial public governance metrics such as SIPAS, PAR-Index, DTI, and PAPI of Ninh Thuan have increased in recent years. However, as a province with many ethnic minorities living, economic life is still difficult, so the ability to access online public services for people in the province, especially ethnic minorities and remote areas, are very limited.

Stemming from the above reality, Ninh Thuan was chosen as the area to study the current situation and causes affecting the provision of "partial" and "full process" online public services of commune-level authorities as well as such as the ability to access and use public services of people, especially ethnic minorities.

1.1. Purpose and scope of the study

1.1.1. Purpose

This research aims to evaluate the current situation and affecting factors related to provision of online public services by commune-level authorities and to assess the accessibility and utilization of online public services by population, especially ethnic minorities in Ninh Thuan province, thereby propose policies that can enhance people's accessibility and utilization of online public services, ultimately leading to greater satisfaction with government initiatives. On this basis, the research proposes solutions and policy recommendations to increase the ability to access and use online public services, especially ethnic minorities in Ninh Thuan province.

1.1.2. Limitations

Geographic Scope:

- Collaborate with the Standing Committee of the Provincial People's Committee (People's Committee) of Ninh Thuan province and representatives among various provincial departments and branches (Department of Information and Communications, Department of Home Affairs, Department of Justice, and Social Insurance, Association Police, Viettel Ninh Thuan, Posts and Telecommunications Ninh Thuan).

- Work with leaders of the People's Committee of Thuan Nam district and representatives of relevant professional agencies of the district and work directly, conduct field surveys at the People's Committee of Phuoc Nam commune and Phuoc Ha commune, Thuan Nam district.

- Work with leaders of Bac Ai District People's Committee and representatives of relevant professional agencies of the district and work directly, conduct field surveys at the People's Committee of Phuoc Chinh and Phuoc Trung communes.

Content Scope:

- Work with leaders of Bac Ai District People's Committee and representatives of relevant professional agencies of the district and work directly and conduct field surveys at the People's Committee of Phuoc Chinh and Phuoc Trung communes.

(1) Issue a certificate of marital status; and,

(2) Interconnection procedures for birth registration, permanent residence and issuance of health insurance cards for children under 6 years old (hereinafter referred to as "3 in 1" interconnection procedures).

These procedures are used by many people, are essential, have an impact on their lives and are strongly influenced by the process of collecting and building a national database (on population-related original information in terms of residence, civil status, health insurance, social insurance, etc.)^{1,2}; At the same time, it also ensures that the criteria are prioritized for implementation in the electronic environment³.

¹ Prime Minister (2015), *Decision No. 714/QĐ-TTg dated May 22, 2015 of the Prime Minister on promulgating a list of national databases that need to be prioritized for implementation to create a foundation for government development electronics, Hanoi.*

² Government Office (2023), *Official Dispatch No. 2084/VPCP-KSTT dated March 30, 2023 on implementing the electronic communication process for 02 groups of essential administrative procedures in Project 06, Hanoi.*

³ Government (2020), *Decree No. 45/2020/ND-CP of the Government on implementing administrative procedures in the electronic environment (Article 21), Hanoi*

1.2. Research methods

1.2.1. Data collection and analysis of Secondary Documents

The research team gathered and analysed secondary data, including official documents and legal materials from both the Central Government and Ninh Thuan province such as Documents of the 14th Ninh Thuan Provincial Party Congress, term 2020 - 2025, and other information posted on the Information Portal of Ninh Thuan province, official reports provided by local authorities to the working group, electronic information pages of Ninh Thuan departments and branches, etc. to learn about the policy, socio-economic development situation and the current situation of accessing, using and providing public administrative services and online public services to people in Ninh Thuan province.

In addition, the research team also consulted the statistics of the General Statistics Office and the latest assessment reports of the PAPI, PAR-INDEX, SIPAS, and DTI provincial index sets of Ninh Thuan.

1.2.2 Discussion and Interview Methods

- **Discussion and in-depth interviews with 19 officials and civil servants** (10 commune levels and 09 district levels),⁴ including standing People's Committees, civil status justice agencies, police agencies, district insurance agencies and representatives of Directs affiliated specialized agencies; Standing People's Committees of communes and especially civil servants at the receiving and returning results and documents department (hereinafter referred to as the "one-stop shops") such as justice - civil status officials, commune police - who are responsible for Responsibility for guiding and providing public administrative services. The goal was to gain an understanding of the status of access, use, difficulties, and aspirations of these officials and civil servants when providing the two procedures mentioned (mention above) to the population, both in-person and online forms.

- **In-depth interviews with 10 individuals** who came to handle public administrative procedures at the People's Committee headquarters of 2 districts and 4 communes selected for research. Among them, 04 people are Kinh people, the rest are ethnic minorities. Age ranges from 32 to 64 years old. The purpose was to elicit people's opinions on public services in general and on the two studied administrative procedures in particular.

- **Observation method:** Research team members (1) played the role of citizens and tried to access the online public service portal of Ninh Thuan province⁵ and the national public service portal⁶ to understand how the two procedures being studied are implemented in the digital environment; At the same time, evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of interface design and utilities on the Portal as a user experience; and (2) The research team

⁴ *Note:* 19 cases were interviewed in-depth directly in the field (10 commune-level officials and 09 district-level officials); Does not include opinions directly exchanged at conferences, seminars and working sessions between the Working Group and localities of Ninh Thuan province.

⁵ <https://dichvucong.ninhthuan.gov.vn/portaldvc/Home/default.aspx>

⁶ <https://dichvucong.gov.vn/p/home/dvc-gioi-thieu.html>

followed and observed civil servants from the civil status agencies and the "one-stop" departments while they provided public services (including issuing marital status certificates and implementing the "3-in-1" interconnection procedures). This allowed the team to gain insights from the perspective of public officials.

- **Expert method:** The research team consults interdisciplinary experts to make assessments, comments and suggest solutions, appropriate policy to improve the quality of provision and accessibility for two public administrative procedures were selected for research. Consultation activities are conducted through working sessions and in-depth discussions with leaders of the Department of Information and Communications and managers of specialized departments to provide preliminary information and advice from the group's research results; discussions, actively listening to insights, and providing preliminary feedback from the Department before proceeding to create the official consultancy report for the local authorities.

In addition, the research team coordinated with the Provincial People's Committee to organize a scientific discussion on the topic "Solutions to improve the quality of online public administrative services towards digital government in Ninh Thuan province" to listen opinions, share, discuss, answer and consult from a team of experts, scientists, and managers on this topic.

1.3. Characteristics of the research area

Ninh Thuan is located in the South Central Coast region, bordering Khanh Hoa province to the North, Binh Thuan province to the South, Lam Dong province to the West and East Sea to the East. Natural area of 3,358 km², with 7 administrative units including 01 city and 6 districts. In 2022, Ninh Thuan's average GRDP per capital reached 76.8 million VND, higher than the average GRDP of the North Central and Central Coast regions. The population in 2022 was 598,683 people. The average population density is 178 people/km², unevenly distributed, mainly concentrated in the coastal plain. The community consists of 3 main ethnic groups: Kinh ethnic group accounts for 75.6%, Cham ethnic group represents for 13%, Raglai ethnic group makes up for 11%, and the rest are other ethnic groups⁷.

As briefed in Table 1, Thuan Nam district is a newly established district of Ninh Thuan province. Thuan Nam is one of two districts with the largest number of Cham ethnic people in the province. Phuoc Ha commune, Thuan Nam district is a mountainous commune, especially difficult. The entire commune includes 968 households (with 3,932 people), of which the Raglai ethnic group has 865 households (with 3,648 people), accounting for 92.71%. There are 495 poor households in the entire commune (with 1,962 people), representing for 51.14%; 187 households are near poor (with 816 people), making up 19.32%. Phuoc Nam commune is the central commune of the district, including 06 villages with a total of 3,338 households and 14,702 people. Among these, ethnic minority households account for 2,854 households with 13,020 people, making up 88.5% of the entire commune's population. As of the end of 2022, there are 604 poor and near-poor households in the commune, comprising 18.09% of all households in the area.⁸

⁷ Source: <https://ninhthuan.gov.vn/portal/pages/Dieu-kien-tu-nhien-va-xa-hoi-.aspx>

⁸ Source: <https://thuannam.ninhthuan.gov.vn/portal/Pages/2023-7-7/Uy-ban-nhan-dan-xa-Phuoc-Nam->

Table 1: Characteristics of study sample

	District	Population (thousands of people)	Ethnic minorities (% total population)	Percentage of Poor Households (%)	Rate of poor ethnic minority households
1	Ninh Thuan province	598.683	24.4%		
2	Thuận Nam District	55.187		5.51% ⁹	95%
2.1	<i>Phuoc Nam Commune</i>	9724	88.5%	18.09%	
2.2	<i>Phuoc Ha Commune</i>	3.932	92.71%.	51,14%	
3	Bac Ai District	30.598	93%	23.48%	99.41%
3.1	<i>Phuoc Chinh Commune</i>	1927	90%	37.47%,	
3.2	<i>Phuoc Trung Commune</i>	2635	93%	> 40%	

Source: Compiled by the research team

Bac Ai district is a mountainous district, a particularly difficult economic zone, with 90% of the Raglai ethnic group. In particular, both Phuoc Trung and Phuoc Chinh communes are extremely difficult mountainous communes of Bac Ai district that are enjoying policies according to Resolution 30a/2008/NQ-CP dated December 27, 2008 of the Government, the project program (for special areas and ethnic minorities)¹⁰.

1.4. Research limitation

This research aims to provide a comprehensive and in-depth assessment of the current state of online public service provision and access, particularly among ethnic minority populations in selected areas of Ninh Thuan province. However, due to time and resource constraints, our study focuses on field research and in-depth analysis of two specific administrative procedures: the issuance of marital status certificates and the "3-in-1" interconnected procedures in the digital environment. As a result, some of our findings and conclusions may not be broadly applicable to the overall landscape of online public service provision, access, and utilization at the commune level in Ninh Thuan province.

A more comprehensive and profound report would be possible with additional time and resources, allowing the research team to work with a broader range of communes and districts beyond the four communes and two districts that were studied, especially communes in Region III, administrative unit representing urban areas (wards, towns). In particular, while research team aimed to engage with more people, particularly ethnic minorities requiring

thuc-hien-tot-cong-takr8o37.aspx

⁹ Source: <https://soldtbxh.ninhthuan.gov.vn/portal/pages/print.aspx?p=28803>

¹⁰ Source:

<http://csdl.ubdt.gov.vn/noidung/vanbandt/SiteAssets/Lists/UBDTVanBanDen/EditForm/ninhthuan.pdf>

assistance with the two specific administrative procedures under investigation, the opportunities for interaction were limited. All voices and feelings of officials, civil servants at all levels, people, and minority groups are very important for the analysis, consultation, and development of recommendations in this report. However, the existing gaps in our research provide a foundation for future investigations on this topic, offering an opportunity to further expand our understanding in subsequent studies.

II. KEY FINDINGS

2.1. Overview of online public service provision in Ninh Thuan province

2.1.1. Status of infrastructure supporting Online Public Services and Digital Transformation

According to the Report of the Department of Information and Communications of Ninh Thuan province, while local conditions still have many financial difficulties, the province is also interested in investing in infrastructure for online public services and digital transformation¹¹:

Mobile: The total number of telephone subscribers across the province is 693,143, reaching a density of 116.3 subscribers/100 people.

Coverage area: By 2023, mobile infrastructure has covered 98.56% of communes/wards, villages/groups and is guaranteed to serve the digital transformation of Ninh Thuan province.

Fixed broadband network: At present, the whole province has 288/289 villages (99.6%) that have fibre optic infrastructure to serve households. Currently, Ma Lam village in Phuoc Tan commune, Bac Ai district does not have infrastructure and telecommunications businesses are implementing the construction of service provision infrastructure in 2023 (Ninh Thuan Department of Information and Communications, 2023).

Network infrastructure: Fixed broadband infrastructure has covered 100% of communes/wards and ensuring support for Ninh Thuan's digital transformation. The province has total of 342,444 broadband internet subscribers (fixed broadband internet is 86,078 subscribers, mobile broadband internet is 256,366 subscribers). Internet density across the province is 98.2 subscribers/100 people.

Ninh Thuan has deployed a data integration and sharing platform for sending and receiving electronic documents, connecting and sharing data between agencies and units operating in the province. Specialized data transmission networks are implemented to provincial, district and commune level agencies. Presently, all 65 communes, wards, and towns are connected, along with all 7 districts and cities, departments, branches, and a range of units under those departments and branches. This network enables online meetings from the central to the commune level in the province. The minimum connection speed at departments, branches, districts/cities is 8Mbps; The minimum connection speed for the commune level is 4Mbps.

¹¹ Report of Ninh Thuan Department of Information and Communications 2023

2.1.2. Digital Human Resources

On April 30, 2023, the People's Committee of Ninh Thuan province issued Plan No. 1718/KH-UBND on training, fostering knowledge and raising awareness of digital skills of departments, departments, branches, fronts, and unions and localities in the province in 2023. The Department of Information and Communications has coordinated with relevant units to develop a Training Plan, fostering knowledge and raising awareness of digital skills for officials, public employees and workers in the province in 2023 with a total of 7 classes with appropriate topics for each group of students such as organizing refresher courses and training on digital transformation on OneTouch mass open online learning platform, organized by the Ministry of Information and Communications. There have been 1,532 students registered to participate, including 413 students at the Department and branch level, and 1,119 students¹² at the district and commune levels.

2.1.3. Current status of public service provision in Ninh Thuan province

Currently, public services in Ninh Thuan province are being deployed on 3 addresses, including: <Dichvucong.ninhthuan.gov.vn> page for citizens, organizations, individuals and businesses; Page <hcc.ninhthuan.gov.vn> and page <mc.ninhthuan.gov.vn> are for officials to manage, exploit, process, and monitor the status of receiving and resolving documents on the system.

According to the Report of the Department of Information and Communications of Ninh Thuan province, by 2023, the number of online public services in the whole province will be 829, a decrease of 03 public services compared to Decision No. 1031/QĐ-UBND of 832 public services due to the abolition of administrative procedures in there:

a) At the provincial level, 595 online public services decreased by 3 public services (265 total online public services, 330 partial online public services);

b) District level 164 online public services (53 full online public services, 111 partial online public services);

c) Commune level has 70 online public services (16 complete online public services, 54 partial online public services) according to Decree No. 42/2022/ND-CP dated June 24, 2022 of the Government;

Up to now, 812/829 public service status has been synchronized to the National Public Service Portal, reaching 97.95%; integrated into the National Public Service Portal 812/829 online public services, attaining 97.95%. From January 1, 2023 to September 7, 2023, the whole province received 275,423 dossiers, of which 43,655 dossiers received directly, accounting for 15.85%, 231,562 dossiers received online, representing for 84%. 06%, 206 applications received via public postal service, making up 0.01% (specifically see Appendix).

- Birth registration has 5,151 records (610 records in person, 4,541 records online);

¹² Report of Ninh Thuan Department of Information and Communications 2023

- Death registration has 2,256 records (228 records in person, 2,028 records online);
- Interconnection administrative procedures for birth registration, permanent residence registration, and issuance of health insurance cards for children under 6 years old have 809 records (22 records in person, 787 records online)¹³.

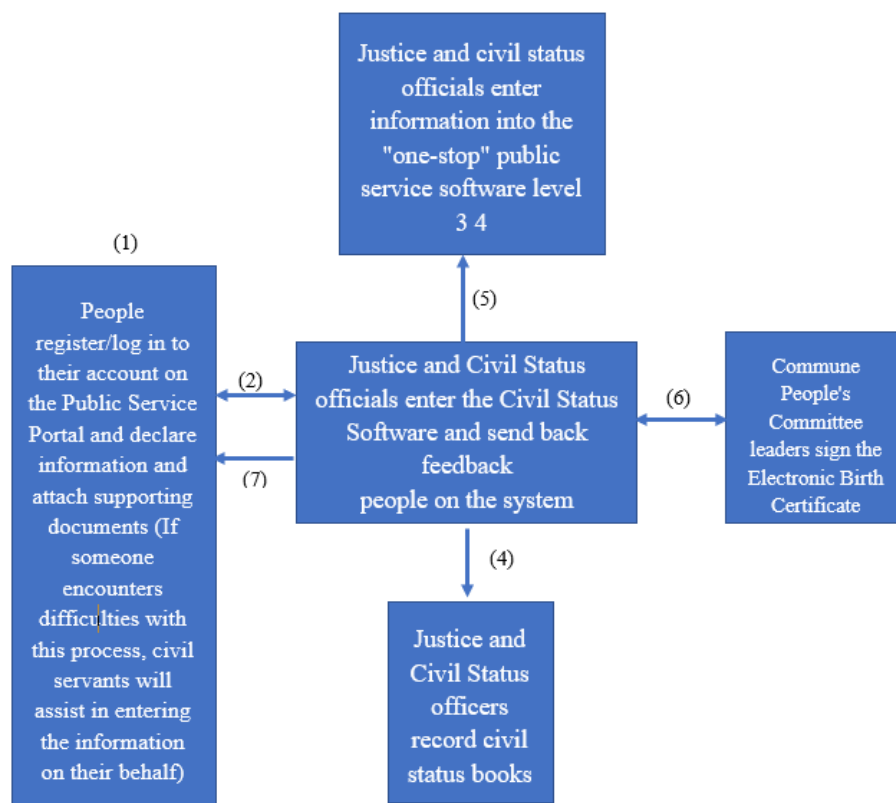
2.2. Main research results on two groups of administrative procedures

2.2.1. Issuance of Marital Status Certificate and “3 in 1” Interconnection Procedures

a. Process of issuing marital status certificate

Based on the research and surveys conducted in the region, the research team has compiled the actual process of issuing marital status certificates as depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Illustrates the process for issuing a certificate of real marital status.



Step 1: The individual requesting a marital status certificate accesses the National Service Portal or Provincial Service Portal, registers/logs in, authenticates the user according to instructions, and correctly identifies the competent commune-level People's Committee. and public services need to be implemented.

The person requesting an online Certificate of Marital Status provides information according to the interactive electronic civil status form to issue a Certificate of Marital Status

¹³ Report of the Department of Information and Communications of Ninh Thuan province

(provided on the DVC Portal), attaching a photocopy or copy, required papers and documents according to regulations (see Appendix). In cases where people cannot do it themselves, judicial and civil status officers act for the people.

Step 2: Judicial and civil status officials verify the validity of the documents on the Civil Status Software and return the electronic marital status confirmation form with complete information to the requester via email or digital device. The requester is responsible for checking the accuracy and completeness of the information on the Electronic Marital Status Certificate form and re-confirming it (maximum one day).

Step 3: Justice and civil status officials update information confirming marital status and officially save it on the shared electronic civil status registration, management software and forward it to the Commune People's Committee leaders for signature.

Step 4: Justice and civil status officials update information into the software "public service levels 3, 4"

Step 5: The civil status-judicial officer records the processed dossier in civil status book.

Step 6: The justice-civil status officer transfers the Certificate of Marital Status to the Chairman of the Commune People's Committee for signature and sends it back to the justice-civil status officer.

Step 7: Individuals make payments for fees and charges using the online payment feature or other methods in compliance with the law and collect the results at the one-stop department.

As a consequence of the lack of interconnected data management software, civil servants may need to input the same information three to four times. In situations where individuals are unable to make declarations themselves (relatively common, particularly among ethnic minorities with limited educational levels), civil servants must make the declarations on their behalf. Unfortunately, the current state of digital transformation not only fails to reduce the workload for civil-status judicial officers but also exacerbates it.

- Users' Views:

Interview with a woman, Raglai ethnic group, Phuoc Chinh commune, said: *"The village head and commune officials mentioned online public services. They also set up an electronic identification account but don't know how to use it, but if they go to Communes do it directly faster and with more peace of mind."*

Interview with a male, Cham ethnic group, Phuoc Trung commune (45 years old): *"I have never done this procedure, but if I do, I will go to the commune headquarters and ask the staff for quick instructions"*.

Evidently, people still prefer the traditional approach of physically visiting the "one-stop" and receiving direct assistance from civil servants, as it makes the procedure more convenient for them. It's important to note that many households reside near the commune-level People's

Committee, so going to the "one-stop" office for administrative procedures doesn't consume much time. The concept of using online public services is still relatively new to them.

- Views of justice and civil status officials at the “one-stop shop”:

Judicial and civil status officer of Phuoc Nam commune: *"Of course working online has many advantages, I strongly support this policy, but since working online, the workload has increased many times, work can be finished at 8pm..."*

Justice and civil status officer of Phuoc Chinh commune: *"Previously, when working in person, it only took 20 minutes to issue documents for one application, but now when working online, we have to write declarations and register for people because people are illiterate, then enter 3 or 4 software, and finally record the civil status book. If you do it in person, you can process many applications a day, but now you can only do 4-5 applications online."*

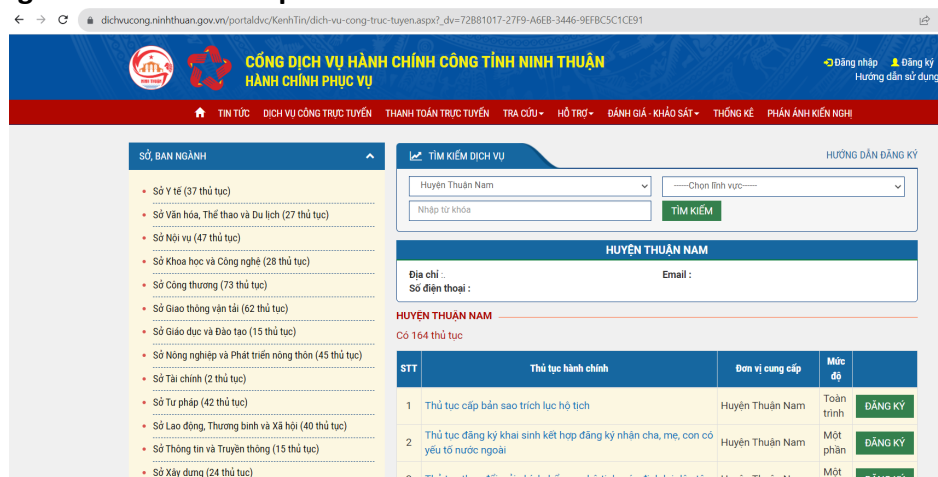
Therefore, to carry out the process of issuing a Certificate of Marital Status, judicial and civil status officers must operate on at least 3 software and still have to record the Civil Status book (not to mention the need to support people perform). As a result, the volume of judicial-civil status officials increased significantly.

- Experience and assessment of the research team:

The research team directly accessed and tested the registration features to handle this procedure on Ninh Thuan's Public Service Portal. To make a request for a certificate of marital status, you must Login/Register for an account. Then go to Online Public services section. Users can search/look up public services in the "Administrative procedures" section or by keywords.

If searching under the [Administrative Procedures] category, in the [Service Search] section: select the district or commune People's Committee responsible for implementation → in the [Field] section: select [Civil Status Field] → press [Search]. The returned result is a list of administrative procedures → select Certificate of marital status → download the declaration form to fill in the information → upload the declaration and supporting documents to the system → confirm information → payment (See Figure 2.)

Figure 2. Ninh Thuan province Public Administrative Services Portal



While the process of issuing a citizen's marital status certificate has been notably simplified compared to the time when household registration books were still in use, the online implementation, as observed by the research team, still exhibits several shortcomings.

Firstly, the Ninh Thuan Public Service Portal lacks user-friendliness, as it lacks a readily available list of public services on the homepage and instructional videos in ethnic languages. The current design of the Public Service Portal assumes users possess prior experience with online transactions and an understanding of the respective department or sector responsible for the public service they intend to carry out. This leaves people, particularly ethnic minorities unfamiliar with online transactions, encountering difficulties and confusion without the guidance of civil servants. As a result, the majority of online submissions in the four surveyed communes are completed with the assistance of civil servants.

Moreover, the absence of an online declaration form and the requirement for people to download declarations and upload supporting documents further complicates matters for individuals without smartphones or lacking technological knowledge and skills. Consequently, many people opt to make direct payments for a quicker and more straightforward process.

Secondly, the Civil Status software provided by the Ministry of Justice does not permit civil status-judicial officers to check, extract, or verify a person's residential status in their previous places of residence. Therefore, in cases where individuals have lived in various localities and fail to provide confirmation from their previous places of residence, justice and civil status officials must dispatch formal requests to obtain this confirmation from the citizen's previous places of residence.

b. Process of Interconnected "3 in 1" Procedures

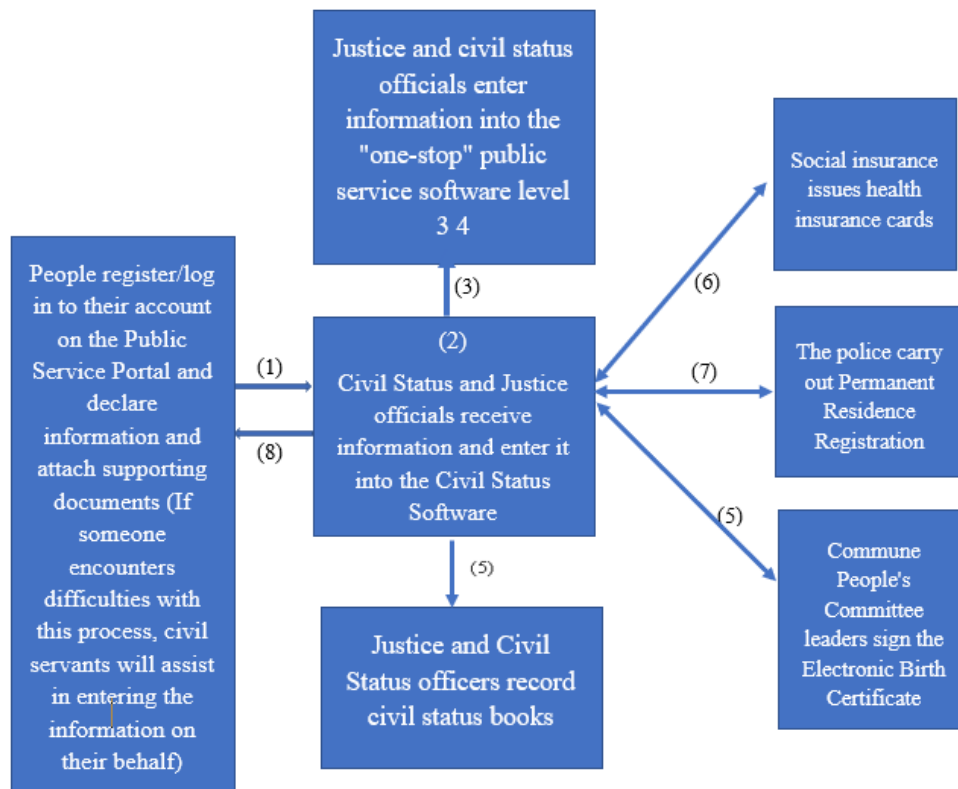
After July 1, 2023¹⁴, following a request from the Government Office and Vietnam Social Insurance, Ninh Thuan province conducted training for civil servants at all levels to implement the "3 in 1" interconnected administrative procedure in person or online level 4 (full course) via the Public Service portal. Implementing Plan No. 3578/KH-UBND dated August 26, 2023 of the Chairman of the Provincial People's Committee on implementing interconnected public services "Birth registration - Permanent residence registration - Issuing health insurance cards for children children under 6 years old in Ninh Thuan province", to implement this group of "3 in 1" interconnected administrative procedures in the province synchronously and effectively, on July 15, 2023, the Department of Justice To advise the Provincial People's Committee to issue Official Dispatch No. 2890/UBND-PVHCC to deploy electronic issuance of birth

¹⁴ Implement Official Dispatch No. 2084/VPCP-KSTT dated March 30, 2023 of the Government Office on implementing the electronic communication process for 02 groups of essential administrative procedures in Project 06 and Decision 976 /QD-BHXH dated June 12, 2023 of Vietnam Social Insurance on the process of receiving and processing electronic administrative documents: Birth registration, permanent residence registration, issuance of insurance cards medical care for children under 6 years old on the National Public Service Portal.

certificates to carry out administrative procedures. Accordingly, from July 2023 until now, the implementation of administrative procedures for birth registration, health insurance card issuance, and permanent residence registration will be carried out directly and online on the National Public Service Portal.

Through surveys in the region, the research team has summarized the current process of interconnected birth registration, permanent residence registration, and health insurance card issuance for children under 6 years old ("3 in 1" linkage) as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. The actual process of Interconnected "3 in 1" procedures.



Step 1: The person requesting the "3 in 1" interconnection procedure accesses the National Public service Portal, registers an account (if does not have an account), and authenticates the user. The person requesting fills in the information and attaches photocopies or electronic copies of papers and documents as prescribed. In cases where people cannot do it themselves, judicial and civil status officers act for the people.

Step 2: Upon receiving the electronic birth registration dossier, justice and civil status officers carry out the birth registration process using the shared electronic civil status registration and management system of the Ministry of Justice. If the dossier is not valid, civil servants will respond to the people (directly/via the Public Service system/email).

Step 3: the Justice and Civil Status Officer transfers the Birth Certificate to the Chairman of the Commune People's Committee to sign and return to the Civil Servant;

Step 4.5: After the electronic copy of the Birth Certificate is issued, the Ministry of Justice's shared electronic civil status registration and management system automatically transfers the Birth Certificate to the interconnected Public Service Software to transfer the electronic records (including forms and declarations that people have declared) to the Social Insurance Industry Information System to issue health insurance cards for children under 6 years old and the Residence Management Information System to register as permanent resident.

Step 6: Justice and civil status officials enter information into Public Service software levels 3 and 4

Step 7: Justice and civil status officials record the processed documents in the Civil Status book.

Step 8: People pay fees and charges through the online payment function or by other means according to law and receive results at "one-stop" department.

- **Users' views:**

Nguyen D. H, 31 years old - Nho Lam village, Phuoc Nam commune, Thuan Nam, Occupation: Electrician; Wife: farmer; Education 12/12, currently carrying out the birth registration procedure, shared: *"The reason for not registering my child's birth on the online public service portal is because I did not know that this can be done on the Internet. My house is also close to 1km from the commune headquarters, so I ran up if I had any problems and asked the commune officials quickly. I willing to use online services if I knew more about them but found online procedures complicated. I'm very busy at work, I don't have time to sit down and read instructions that have a lot of text, many confusing parts, and I don't know who to contact for assistance."*

As a result, people still have the habit and mentality of wanting to work directly at the Commune People's Committee because Civil Servants will directly guide (or do it for them). In addition, the distance to the Commune People's Committee is not too far, so people choose to go to the Commune People's Committee headquarters to carry out administrative procedures while online public services are still too new and too complicated for them.

- **Views of public officials and civil servants:**

A judicial officer in Phuoc Ha commune shared: *"Since implementing the "3 in 1" interconnection, the work has been done faster, but because people are illiterate and only know how to read, they still have to support people declare information. Overall, the work is even more than before."*

Another opinion shared more about the work pressure when performing the "3 in 1" interconnection: "Normally, with a stable network, it only takes 20 minutes to complete one application. But the device is old, and the network is poor, so waiting to get the Citizen Identification Code takes a long time, sometimes it takes all day without being able to do it (Female, judicial officer in Phuoc Chinh commune).

Consequently, like the process of issuing a certificate of marital status, implementing the "3 in 1" procedure requires justice and civil status officials to operate within a minimum of 3 software systems. They must also maintain the Civil Status book (not mention to assist individuals throughout the procedure and endure waiting times due to software system errors). Rather than decreasing, the workload for judicial and civil status officials has significantly increased after the transition.

- Experience and assessment of the research team

The research team tested registration to implement "3 in 1" communication on the National Public Service Portal (Figure 4) and Ninh Thuan Provincial Public Administrative Service Portal (Ninh Thuan Service Portal) (Figure 5) for comparison. and reviews.

Firstly, to implement "3 in 1" public service on the national public service portal, people are required to register an account, have a genuine SIM card and install level 2 electronic identification software (VneID) to get the OTP code authentication of registration information.

Secondly, if done on Ninh Thuan Public Service Portal, people must download the declaration form because there is no online declaration form. Judicial and civil status officers will verify, compare the information and enter it into the Civil Status software, then transfer it to the Insurance and Police systems (to get the Citizen Identification code). In many cases, when the transmission system has problems or the data, information do not match, the process of getting the Citizen Identification code can last 1-2 days.

Thirdly, to grant "3 in 1" interconnected procedures, justice and civil status officers must also operate on at least 3 software systems and still have to record the Civil Status book.

Figure 4: "3 in 1" Interconnected public services on the National Public Service Portal



Figure 5: "3 in 1" interconnected public services on Ninh Thuan Public Service Portal



2.2.2. Human Resources

a. Leaders and civil servants

- Basically, the party committees and leaders in the surveyed districts and communes are aware of the significance of digital transformation and providing online public services to the public. However, there remains a lack of proper understanding among some leaders and managers about digital transformation, online public services, and the specific requirements for delivering online public services that align with their respective areas, so directing implementation is still confusing, lacking determination, not proactive in overcoming difficulties in providing online public services, having signs of blaming a lot on the objective side, on the people.

- All districts and communes of Ninh Thuan arrange 01 office staff to be the "one-stop" department. Additionally, the number of justice and civil status officials is typically limited to only one person, despite the heavy workload that arises from both professional duties and assisting the public with accessing online public services. In fact, communes must arrange other department officials to support civil status officials in steps such as scanning records, papers and instructing people to enter data. For example, Phuoc Nam commune assigned the IT-savvy commune secretary to operate, helping the civil status and justice department receive registration documents on online software. The number of civil servants specialized in information technology at district and commune levels is remains inadequate, so the implementation of online public services still faces many difficulties, especially at the commune level.

- Justice and civil status officers as well as one-stop departments in the study area are generally proficient in their work and firmly grasp the implementation process. In some communes such as Phuoc Trung and Phuoc Ha, the civil servants responsible for receiving and processing documents have practical experience in doing this work for more than 10 years. However, in some communes, newly appointed official lacks familiar with the work, and there are still some procedures that they do not understand, so the work is handled slowly.

b. Community Digital Technology Team

According to the report of Ninh Thuan Province, the Province has established 2,439 community digital technology teams. Members of the community 439 community digital technology teams at the commune level include the Chairman of the commune, the front, and other members; At the village level, including the village secretary/head (as team leader), local corporations, councils, educators, etc.

Recently, the Provincial Department of Information and Communications has conducted multiple training courses to educate community digital technology team's members about core administrative procedures. However, there is no official support regime in place for these team members.

The status of the operation of the community digital technology team: Up to now, the province has not conducted an official survey or assessment of the performance of the

community digital technology team. However, according to Department of Information and Communications and districts and departments surveys' reports, the primary role of community digital technology team is to assist district-level civil servants and social officials to implement online public services. Support and guide people in implementing online public services remains many restrictions as members of the community digital technology team do not have mobile phones, cannot identify procedures and struggle to operate software applications.

The village chief of Phuoc Trung commune (female, 43 years old) shared: *"The village chiefs are reputable that many years old, so they are not familiar with phone , they only help raise awareness and guide people to go to the commune to complete the procedures."*

The assessment of a regional and social official said: *"The Community Digital Technology Group's effectiveness remains suboptimal, despite receiving training, due to inconsistent awareness among its members... and a significant number of members lack access to phones or any supportive regime."*

c. Citizens

Ninh Thuan is characterized by a substantial portion of its population belonging to various ethnic minorities. The province currently encompasses 32 different ethnic minority groups, totalling approximately 144,200 individuals, constituting 24.4% of the total population. In particular, the mountainous district of Bac Ai has over 90% of the population are Raglai people, the educational level is still uneven. The economic conditions are very difficult, the prevalence of poor and near-poor households remains notably high in the research area, particularly in Bac Ai district, which is designated as a special difficulty district within Ninh Thuan province. In certain areas, such as Phuoc Nam commune, people reside scattered in the mountains, situated approximately 10km away from the commune's administrative centre (Phuoc Nam commune). Reports from the People's Committees of communes (especially 2 communes in Bac Ai district), indicate that a considerable proportion of the population lacks ownership of phones or smartphones, internet access, and the ability to read and write Vietnamese being limited (only can listen and understand Vietnamese).

Moreover, within the research communes, the young population predominantly engages in seasonal work in different regions, leaving the elderly, women, and children as the primary residents in the localities. Consequently, online public service accessibility and utilization present even greater challenges for the local population, particularly among ethnic minorities. Besides, people still have the habit and mentality that when administrative procedures arise, they will go directly to the commune headquarters to reassure them. Consequently, the introduction of public services remains a relatively novel concept for the people in this area.

2.2.3. Facilities

- **Equipment and machinery at the One-Stop Department:** Based on data from the research communes, equipment serving the One-Stop Department such as computers, scanners, and printers have mostly been provided since 2015. These devices unable to install

Win10, incompatible with some service software, frequent errors, slowness, affecting the process of providing information services to staff at the One-Stop Department.

- **Bandwidth, network connection:** The monthly subscription payment of communes is about 300,000 thousand VND/month - equivalent to the usage level of a household.

- **Ninh Thuan province public service portal:** The interface of the province's public service portal is not user-friendly, there is no video, audio, or ethnic language instructions. Essential public services are not displayed or suggested on the home page. The process of implementing online public services is still relatively complicated compared to people's level (especially with low education people and ethnic minorities), for example there is no online declaration form and requirement to download the declaration.

- **Software system:** The civil status software and the Ministry of Public Security's software sometimes experience instability or issues that disrupt the execution of interconnected procedures (for example, it may take 2-3 days to receive a citizen identification code if the system encounters problems). Data transmission lines frequently disconnect or become overloaded during office hours or at the end of the workday when agencies simultaneously upload files and documents to the district's centralized system. Meanwhile, the data storage system has not received adequate attention.

Interconnection and data connection between central and local information service provision online public systems, between ministries and branches have not been implemented. For example, Software of the Ministry of Public Security and Civil Status Software of the Ministry of Justice; The Ministry's civil status software does not yet allow civil servants to check and extract shared data but still have to carry out the process of sending official dispatches and asking for confirmation (as mentioned in Section 2.2.1 on the process of issuing status confirmation certificates for marital status).

2.3. General Assessment

2.3.1. Legal and policy framework

The legal framework and policy mechanisms related to administrative procedures are not synchronized at many points and overlap, causing many difficulties in implementing online public services, specifically:

- **Regarding procedures for issuing certificates of marital status:** Regulations stipulate civil status procedures, which include the issuance of certificates of marital status, that require citizens' records to verify their previous residency in a locality. However, following Decree No. 104/2022/ND-CP, household registration books and temporary residence books are no longer considered valid. Additionally, the civil status software system lacks the capacity to grant judicial and civil status officials access to and verification of an applicant's previous residency. This complicates the handling of procedures for issuing certificates of marital status or marriage registrations for citizens, as it often necessitates the submission of confirmations. In case it cannot be provided, the justice and civil status officer must make an official dispatch requesting the previous localities to confirm in writing.

- **Law on Civil Status:** In addition to implementing the professional processes within the software, commune-level civil servants are still required to follow the civil status book recording procedures as outlined in the Law on Civil Status, which became effective on July 16, 2020¹⁵. There are no instructions provided for printing and archiving results directly from the software instead of manual recording. As a result, the workload for justice and civil status officials has effectively doubled.

- **Procedures:** The process of bringing an administrative procedure to the online environment requires restructuring the administrative procedure process and strengthening electronic authentication. However, currently, the process of implementing online public services is still quite complicated, with many steps causing civil servants and people to encounter many difficulties in implementing, especially online public services levels 3 and 4. Civil servants must perform the operation through many steps, on many software, from scanning and downloading papers and documents... People, whether doing it in person or online, must go to the Commune People's Committee at least twice: 1 one time to submit the application in person (if you have to provide an authorization document for birth registration, etc.) because these documents must be originals, and one time the people come to receive it in person to sign/fingerprint in the Birth Registration Book (or in cases where the original birth certificate or birth certificate must be added, the birth certificate is required when the child is born outside a medical facility).

In addition, according to research results, the Provincial People's Committee assigned targets to the District and Commune People's Committees on the number of online documents in the entire process, so most of these transactions at the commune level are carried out by civil servants to assist people¹⁶. This is also the reason that creates pressure for civil servants in the process of providing public services in the early stages.

2.3.2. Education levels and Economic Conditions of the Population

The residents of Ninh Thuan continue to grapple with economic hardships, exhibit disparities in their educational levels, and face limitations in accessing IT equipment. Many lack internet access, computers, or smartphones. Many individuals in the surveyed districts and communes (particularly the elderly and women), have never engaged in online activities or used applications on the internet or mobile devices. A significant portion of the population experiences challenging economic circumstances and do not have mobile phones or computers to perform online public services.

Moreover, many individuals fail to recognize the benefits and necessity of utilizing online public services and exhibit reluctance to engage with online public services. Respondents often prefer visiting state agencies and "commune headquarters" directly to receive guidance on administrative procedures and to feel more at ease

¹⁵ Circular No. 04/2020/TT-BTP dated May 28, 2020 of the Ministry of Justice detailing the implementation of a number of articles of the Law on Civil Status and Decree No. 123/2015/ND-CP dated November 15, 2015 of the Government detailing a number of articles and measures to implement the Law on Civil Status, effective from July 16, 2020

¹⁶ Provincial People's Committee assigned according to Decision 245/QD-UBND

2.3.3. Capacity and working motivation of civil servants

The research results indicate that justice and civil status officers possess a basic understanding of the procedures for implementing the two sets of procedures. However, they are still confused and not proficient in using and manipulating software and machines to support the implementation online public service, especially when infrastructure and machinery fail to meet the work requirements of commune officials well. Arranging personnel with deep expertise, specialized in information technology, computer science, and data science at the commune level during the digital transformation process is also impossible due to regulations on streamlining the apparatus.

Moreover, during the transition period, which necessitates a combination of traditional and online public service delivery, the province experiences downsizing, resulting in many civil servants relocating or changing positions. However, the failure to recruit replacements places an increased workload on the remaining civil servants, often doubling or tripling their responsibilities, while the newly transferred or recruited officers lack a solid grasp of the processes and lacks experiences.

Besides, low wages, a lack of benefits, and insufficient other incentives, coupled with increased workloads and inadequate working conditions (due to the lack of suitable machinery and equipment), contribute to the significant pressure experienced by civil servants (especially at the commune level). This pressure has led to reduced motivation among civil servants to provide online public services for the population.

2.3.4. Digital Infrastructure

Mobile devices: To engage with public services, individuals must possess a smartphone or computer, register their SIM cards under the owner's name, and install level 2 VNeID identification software (required for the "3 in 1" interconnection procedure), and access the internet. Meanwhile, the proportion of people with smartphones and internet connections in the research area remains significantly low. Many people are accustomed to using disposable SIM cards, and if they have registered genuine SIM cards but use them infrequently, they may face penalties of SIM card 1 side-deactivation.

- **Software Solution systems and application platforms:** coordination and sharing mechanism between ministries and branches in surveying, building software solutions and application platforms of ministries and branches (Ministry of Public Security, Ministry of Justice and Vietnam Social Insurance) still have many shortcomings. Therefore, data is not interconnected, many data fields have not been integrated on the shared database system, forcing justice and civil status officials to re-enter data many times on software.

- **Database for digital transformation:** The digitization of documents is progressing slowly, leading to an incomplete national population database that lacks the capability for checking, comparing, and extracting data. According to the report, Ninh Thuan has connected, integrated, and exploited 20 basic information fields in the national population database with 100% of the province's information services to serve in handling administrative procedures of

agencies, units and local; In total, there are 899 accounts registering information to connect and exploit the national population database for provincial, district/city and commune level units participating in the connection. However, through review, there are many registered accounts but in fact do not participate in exploiting the national population database¹⁷.

- **Bandwidth and internet connection:** The capacity of bandwidth and internet subscription lines is still low, not ensuring the implementation of online public services, especially in mountainous communes. People's economic conditions are still difficult, especially the proportion of people in remote areas with terminal equipment is limited.

- **Equipment and machinery in the "One-Stop Shops":** Equipment and machinery in the "One-stop" Department do not meet the requirements of implementing online public service. A combination of aging machinery and poor internet connections hampers the effectiveness of online public service delivery, leading to time loss for both civil servants and citizens.

2.3.5. Economic Conditions and Local Investment Level

Ninh Thuan province still has many difficulties in economic conditions, with insufficient budget allocated to modernize equipment and build basic infrastructure to improve the quality of online public services. The whole province has up to 5 communes with extreme difficulties, the rate of multi-dimensional poor households is higher than the national average (the proportion of poor households that are ethnic minorities accounts for 57.9% of the total number of poor households in the province). Many localities surveyed have annual budget revenues that are not enough for expenses. Therefore, it is necessary to balance and prioritize socio-economic development tasks, ensuring security for people and ethnic minorities rather than investing funds to improve and enhance the quality of online public services or support activities for community digital technology groups and Project 06 at commune, hamlet, village and neighbourhood levels.

¹⁷ Report of Ninh Thuan Department of Information and Communications

III. PROPOSED SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. Proposed solutions

3.1.1. Completing the legal framework, policies, and administrative procedures

- Review and propose amendments to regulations that are outdated, overlapping, causing difficulties in providing online public services; Review, reduce and simplify administrative procedures regulations.

- Complete the process of providing online public information services. The process of receiving and resolving online administrative procedures must be associated with the process of simplifying administrative procedures, suitable for the online environment. Develop solutions in cases where people do not have smartphones and official SIM cards and do not have online payments.

- Strengthen supervision of the process of granting online public service procedures to ensure completion before and on time compared to the prescribed time, minimize the situation of overdue documents, avoid the situation of appointment and actual return results times are different.

- Based on the actual conditions of each locality (residential, economic, geographical, residential, cultural and social characteristics of each locality) to allocate reasonable targets for providing online public services, should not set the same target level for all localities, creating competitive pressure, leading to "achievement disease".

3.1.2. Improving the capacity, working regime and motivation of civil servants

- Enhance the role and responsibility of leaders in the digital transformation process, providing online public information to the people. Regularly inspect and evaluate the leadership and management capacity of party committees and authorities at all levels in digital transformation and providing online public services information to the people.

- Regularly open refresher and training classes (in person, online) for justice and civil status officers and the "one-stop shops" on knowledge, digital transformation skills, IT skills and online public services. Organizing training classes suitable to the characteristics of members of the community digital technology team (usually older people), should focus on "hands on work" and instructing 1 or 2 core members to instruct other members.

- Review and evaluate the situation of resolving administrative procedures to arrange and allocate personnel in a reasonable and effective manner based on transaction frequency and workload at the "One-Stop" Department at district and commune levels. Research the rotation arrangement and increase of specialized personnel in information technology, digital transformation combined with administrative procedure control positions at the "one-stop shop" department in communes/wards.

- Pilot socialization and outsourcing of work such as supporting the supply of online public services, instructing the use of online public services at commune and district levels (like the Call Center model) instead of recruiting new personnel.

3.1.3. Propagating and raising people's awareness about online public services and digital transformation

- Raising people's awareness in many different forms, turning the implementation of online public services and digital transformation into an inherent need and people see the value of using digital services. To do this, it is necessary to add a voice reception tool in looking up procedures on the province's public services Portal; create and broadcast short instructional videos with ethnic minority voices at the commune-level "one-stop" department in places where most ethnic minorities live.

- Comprehensive survey and assessment of the organization and operational efficiency of the Community Digital Technology Group in Ninh Thuan province. On that basis, propose policy solutions to further promote the role of community digital technology team.

- Department of Information and Communications surveys, studies, and organizes a pilot model for handling mobile online administrative procedures in remote mountainous communes (following the model of Ha Giang). Accordingly, organize sessions to provide public services and propagate, guide online public services for people (periodically during the month), increasing opportunities and accessibility of public services for ethnic minorities in difficult and remote areas.

- The Department of Information and Communications and the Department of Education and Training should collaborate to create awareness campaigns for students and teachers in Ninh Thuan regarding digital transformation; Establish groups of teachers and students at schools to coordinate with community digital technology groups to advocate and communicate about utilities, processes, procedures, and ways to access and use online public services for families and people in their resident areas.

- Diversify publications, diversify the forms, channels, and media for publications and propaganda with eye-catching, concise, and easy-to-understand designs. Tailor the approach to the culture and beliefs of the local people. Prioritize using easily accessible channels such as social networks and Zalo.

3.1.4. Investing in digital infrastructure construction

- The Department of Information and Communications advises the Provincial People's Committee and provides professional and technical guidance to the District and Commune People's Committees to clearly identify necessary components when formulating and implementing investment plans. This will ensure the improvement and upgrading the province's infrastructure will be synchronous, systematic and seamless with the national infrastructure in preparation for the digitization of public administrative services. The focus should be on four critical infrastructure layers: (i) database infrastructure; (ii) application infrastructure; (iii) connection infrastructure, and (iv) equipment infrastructure.

- All levels of government from provincial to commune level need to have a mechanism to review, maintain, upgrade, and purchase new products as well as pay attention to regular inspection and evaluation of IT systems and internet connections, telecommunications

networks, investing in data backup systems, etc. to improve the productivity of administrative management and provision of online public services throughout the province, especially at commune level and remote mountainous localities.

- Upgrading the Ninh Thuan Provincial Public Service Portal: simplifying the design, optimizing the selection categories to make it easier for people to use; display essential public services right on the homepage; develop interactive electronic declaration forms; Develop detailed instructional videos on how to file documents (in Vietnamese and ethnic languages).

- Accelerate database construction and connection, synchronize data with software from the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Public Security. This will facilitate the comparison, verification, and extraction of data, ultimately reducing the workload and processing time for civil servants at the “one-stop shops”.

3.2. Recommendations

3.2.1. Recommendation to Ninh Thuan Provincial People's Committee and relevant departments and agencies

- The province's digital transformation strategy needs to clearly define the roadmap, goals, and specific steps, suitable to the conditions and characteristics of Ninh Thuan instead of "reiterating" the national digital transformation strategy. The strategy needs to have a comprehensive, people-centered approach to develop policies to ensure that all people, groups, subjects, and ages are taken care of (especially ethnic minorities), ensuring that no one is left behind in the digital transformation process, towards inclusive and sustainable development.

- Maintain both online and face-to-face public services; Do not follow the results of online reports, misjudge reality and thereby build unfeasible policies.

- Organize monitoring and evaluation (hire experts to experience and independently evaluate) the province's process of providing online public services at all levels, pointing out limitations and inadequacies in aspects of procedures, people, and technological infrastructure. There is a basis for making appropriate adjustments to local conditions.

- Integrate resources from the National Target Programs for socio-economic development in ethnic minority and mountainous areas in the period 2021 - 2030, the New Rural Program, and the Hunger Elimination and Poverty Reduction Program. This is an important basis for Ninh Thuan to continue to support investment in infrastructure and human resources for this area to eliminate hunger, reduce poverty, ensure social security, and promote economic- society development, raising people's awareness, creating conditions for people to access and use digital services.

- Mobilize socialization resources from businesses and investors in the province to support IT equipment for poor communes, which remains many difficulties and majority of ethnic minorities.

3.2.2. Recommendation to the Central Level

a. For the National Assembly

- Research and changes relevant provisions in the Law on Civil Status and related legal documents such as Decree No. 87/2020/ND-CP dated July 28, 2020 on electronic civil status database, online civil status registration with the regulation that the requester must be present in person at the civil status registration agency when performing and receiving the results of the procedure in the direction of narrowing the scope of civil status procedures requiring physical presence and increase the use of personal identification numbers to avoid inconvenience, repeated travel for people and create favourable conditions to promote online public services for this procedure.

b. For to the Government

- Regularly review, supplement, edit and complete the legal framework and policies on digital transformation, online public services, ensuring the implementation of information services. Administrative procedures are largely issued by the central level, so central agencies are responsible for restructuring these procedures to implement them in a digital environment, and then provide guidance for local authorities implement uniformly.

- The Government needs to request industries related to each group of administrative procedures and online public services to urgently build synchronous, interconnected software or shared platforms; take the citizen identification code as the root of the user profile; take the electronic signature associated with the ID code of the civil servant in the main responsible role as a basis for confidence in approving the dossier (electronic authentication), while minimizing the use of paper and electronic copies but the same information or there is too much duplicate information.

- Explore mechanisms to integrate policies and maximize resources from other programs and policies supporting public service development in challenging provinces (such as the National Target Program on Sustainable Poverty Reduction, New Rural Areas, and Socio-Economic Development in ethnic minority and mountainous areas, etc.).

- Emphasize practicality and avoid setting quantitative targets that deviate from reality. Implementing online public services is a gradual process with each step requiring a roadmap. Consider the economic and social characteristics of each locality to assign online public service targets that are appropriate and feasible. Avoid the pitfalls of an "achievement-focused" approach, and instead prioritize actual effectiveness and feasibility at each stage.

- Consider building a mechanism to socialize the supply of public services and establish a reasonable inspection and control mechanism, promulgate standards for public service quality, including online public service.

c. For the Ministry of Information and Communications

- Promote the implementation of Resolution No. 52-NQ/TW, issued on September 27, 2019, by the Politburo, which outlines major guidelines and orientations for building data to serve the digital transformation such as: "Improving laws and policies on data, data management, facilitating the creation, connection, sharing and exploitation of data to ensure information safety and network security in the country".

- Review and upgrade the network system of the National Service Portal to ensure quick and successful application submission. Simplify the operations of registering an account, submitting documents and paying online fees and charges (if any) on the Portal so that citizens can easily access and use it, contributing to improving efficiency of implement public service for people nationwide in general and local people in particular.

- Pursuant to Decree No. 42/2022/ND-CP dated June 24, 2022, the Ministry of Information and Communications urgently develops and issues guiding documents on minimum standards for interface design of public services portals at the provincial level, ensuring standards that are user-centered, user-friendly, accessible, easy to use, taking into account specific user groups (ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, the elderly); At the same time, regularly review the compliance of local authorities at all levels.

- Develop a Digital Competency Framework for civil servants and include digital skills content in training programs to train and foster civil servants. Therefore, civil servants have a basis for learning, training, and improving IT skills and digital skills to meet the job requirements.

d. For the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Public Security

- It is essential to promptly establish the mechanism for sharing the national population database between the Ministry of Public Security and other ministries and branches, including the Ministry of Justice, particularly in the context of the Electronic Civil Status Database. This aligns with the provisions of Decision 06/QĐ-TTg issued by the Prime Minister on the Project for developing population data applications, electronic identification, and authentication to support national digital transformation from 2022 to 2025, with a vision to 2030.

- The two Ministries coordinate and research to soon have technical solutions to integrate and connect similar information fields in forms including Birth Registration Declaration, Participation Declaration, and adjustment of social insurance, health insurance, or "digital" birth registration for children based on effective exploitation of the national database that has been connected nationwide; Minimize command operations in the electronic environment for "3 in 1" interconnected procedure.

- The Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Public Security should work together to develop a mechanism for decentralizing access and data utilization from the national population database. This mechanism should expedite the resolution of online public service matters, reducing the need for direct interventions or technical interventions, such as applying for the IDCN code for the "3 in 1" procedure or sending official letters to confirm previous residence for the Certificate of Marital Status.

- The Ministry of Justice needs to provide more detailed and specific specialized guidance documents regarding the Civil Status Book to local authorities, with a focus on commune-level authorities. This guidance should enable local authorities to proactively digitize and manage Civil Status Books and related documents, ensuring compliance with current legal requirements¹⁸ while adapting to the local digital transformation context. The aim is to reduce the workload on grassroots civil servants.

¹⁸ Reference: Article 12, Decree No. 123/2015/ND-CP; Clause 2, Article 25, Decree No. 87/2020/ND-CP; Article 37, Circular No. 04/2020/TT-BTP.

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