

# Community Digital Technology Governance and Participation: The Role of the Youth Union in Southeast Vietnam (Cases of Ho Chi Minh City, Binh Duong, and Dong Nai)

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## ABSTRACT:

Vietnam officially launched the National Digital Transformation Program in 2020 under Decision No. 749/QĐ-TTg of the Prime Minister. Within this policy framework, Community Digital Technology Teams have emerged as an innovative grassroots model to support local residents in adopting digital technologies and participating in digital transformation processes at the local level. Since early 2022, these teams have been established nationwide, with the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union identified as a core and pioneering force. Drawing on survey data collected from 360 Youth Union members, together with relevant secondary sources, this paper examines the role and performance of the Youth Union in Community Digital Technology Teams in Ho Chi Minh City, Binh Duong, and Dong Nai provinces. On this basis, several policy recommendations are proposed to strengthen the contribution of the Youth Union to the development of digital government, the digital economy, and digital society at the local level.

**Keywords:** Digital transformation, Youth Union, Southeast Vietnam, Community Digital Technology, Governance and Participation.

## 1. Introduction

In Vietnam, digital transformation was formally institutionalized with the Prime Minister's approval of "the National Digital Transformation Program to 2025, with a vision to 2030", under Decision No. 749/QĐ-TTg dated 3 June 2020. The program is structured around three interrelated pillars: Digital Government, Digital Economy, Digital Society.

Southeast Vietnam is characterized by high population density and strong economic dynamism. Ho Chi Minh City, together with Binh Duong, Dong Nai, and Ba Ria–Vung Tau provinces, constitutes a focal economic zone that plays a pivotal role in the country's socio-economic development. In line with the national digital transformation strategy, Southeast Vietnam has made notable progress in socio-economic

development, contributing to both regional and national growth. Within this context, the Youth Union that represents a dynamic, adaptable, and technologically capable social force, has made significant contributions from the early stages of local digital transformation initiatives. Based on primary survey data and secondary sources, this paper analyzes the role of the Youth Union in community digital technology governance teams in Ho Chi Minh City, Binh Duong, and Dong Nai, and proposes policy recommendations to scale up the “digital society” governance model at the local level and to further strengthen the Youth Union’s role in digital governance within this framework.

## 2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. Key Concepts

#### *The Youth Union, Youth Union Members, Youth Union Officers*

The Youth Union comprises exemplary young people with revolutionary ethics, a strong sense of law observance, a cultured lifestyle, and a commitment to community service; they possess competence and resilience in international integration and have sufficient health, knowledge, skills, and industrial discipline required for collective labor, thereby becoming responsible citizens of the nation (Youth Union Charter, 2017). In the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the implementation of the National Digital Transformation Strategy, the Youth Union enjoys significant advantages stemming from its young demographic, strong aspirations, rapid adaptability, and creative capacity to master advanced science and technology, which are factors that play a decisive role in development and international integration.

#### *Community Digital Technology Team*

The National Digital Transformation Strategy emphasizes a people-centered approach, in which digital transformation begins with and is driven by citizens. When digital technologies create tangible value for people and are widely adopted in daily life, a digital community can emerge, providing a foundation for the development of digital government, the digital economy and digital

society. It is therefore essential to enable people to perceive technology as accessible and practical through activities of the Community Digital Technology Teams. These teams should be established at the grassroots level such as villages, hamlets, and residential neighborhoods. In addition to village or neighborhood leaders as key members, the Youth Union should serve as the core force of these teams (Ministry of Information and Communications, 2022).

Combining enthusiasm for community engagement, a willingness to experiment with innovation, proficiency in digital platforms and technologies, and strong communication and guidance skills, the progressive youth play a central role in assisting local residents in adopting digital platforms and services. Community Digital Technology Teams are tasked with bringing digital platforms, technologies, and skills to local residents, helping them get used to the digital environment, and thereby becoming catalysts for more robust digital transformation in government.

Community Digital Technology Teams operate close to and alongside local residents, functioning as an extension of Digital Transformation Steering Committees from the provincial and district levels down to communes, wards, towns, and grassroots units. These teams are responsible for disseminating information, providing guidance and support for local residents in the use of digital technologies, and embedding digital solutions into all aspects of daily life. Consequently, local residents are able to access technology in a simple and natural manner, grounded in real needs and generating tangible value. Specifically, the teams carry out the following tasks: (i) Disseminating the Party’s guidelines and the State’s policies and laws on digital transformation widely to households and people in villages and residential areas; (ii) In the area of digital government, providing local residents with guidance on how to use online public services and other digital services, and interact with government authorities via evaluated and selected digital platforms; (iii) In the area of the digital economy, providing enterprises, household businesses, and local residents with guidance on various activities, including: Registering and

participating in e-commerce platforms such as *voso.vn* and *postmart.vn*; Opening electronic payment accounts; Using digital platforms and technologies to upload images, popularize products, create online storefronts, and receive orders, package goods, and most importantly, commit to providing products of assured quality to customers; and Using applications of digital technologies in production and business activities in line with local socio-economic conditions (Ministry of Information and Communications, 2022); (iv) In the area of digital society, providing local residents with assistance in accessing, installing, and using digital services that meet essential needs such as healthcare, education, social welfare, and disease prevention through digital platforms.

## 2.2. Theoretical Framework

### *Digital Society Theory*

There are various approaches to understanding the concept of a digital society. In its most general sense, a “digital society” refers to a society in which technology is seamlessly integrated into all aspects of life. In such a society, citizens are connected, able to interact, and equipped with digital skills to effectively utilize digital services, thereby forming new relationships in the digital environment, as well as developing digital habits and a digital culture. In a broader sense, the digital society encompasses all spheres of human activity, including government, the economy, education, healthcare, culture, and entertainment. Within this context, individuals can easily access information, communicate with one another, and conduct transactions in a fast and convenient manner. In a narrower sense, the digital society consists of digital citizens and digital culture. Digital citizens are individuals who possess the ability to use digital technologies for learning, working, and participating in social activities. Digital culture refers to the values, norms, and behaviors that emerge and evolve within the digital society.

From this perspective, digital citizens are individuals who are capable of using information and communication technologies in an effective and responsible manner across most areas of social

life, from the local level to the national and global levels. Digital citizenship comprises the following components:

- The ability to access digital information resources
- The ability to communicate in the digital environment
- Skills for conducting transactions and purchasing goods and services in the digital environment
- Ethical standards in the digital environment
- The protection of physical and psychological well-being against the impacts of the digital environment
- The rights and responsibilities of citizens in the digital environment
- Digital identity, authentication, personal data, and privacy rights in the digital environment

### *Digital Culture*

- Digital culture refers to the system of values, norms, beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes of individuals in the process of using digital technologies. It encompasses various dimensions, including behavioral culture, creative culture, business culture, and governance culture within the digital environment.
- Digital culture plays a crucial role in the formation and development of a digital society. It contributes to guiding and regulating human behavior in the digital environment, while promoting the development of economic, social, cultural, and educational activities.

### *Social Capital Theory*

**Social capital** is the concept of social capital was first introduced in 1916 by Lyda Judson Hanifan, referring to elements such as goodwill, mutual sympathy, and social interaction among individuals and families [9]. In the 1960s, Jane Jacobs revisited the concept when describing social relationships in urban life. However, social capital only became a significant scientific concept following Pierre Bourdieu’s work *“The Forms of Capital”* (1986) [23],

and was subsequently further developed by James Coleman (1988) [24], Francis Fukuyama (2001 [25]; 2002 [26]...). Accordingly, several common features of social capital can be identified as follows: social capital is closely associated with social networks and social relationships; it is regarded as a form of social resource; it is generated through investment in social relationships or networks, which individuals can utilize to obtain benefits; and it fundamentally involves issues of trust and reciprocity [9].

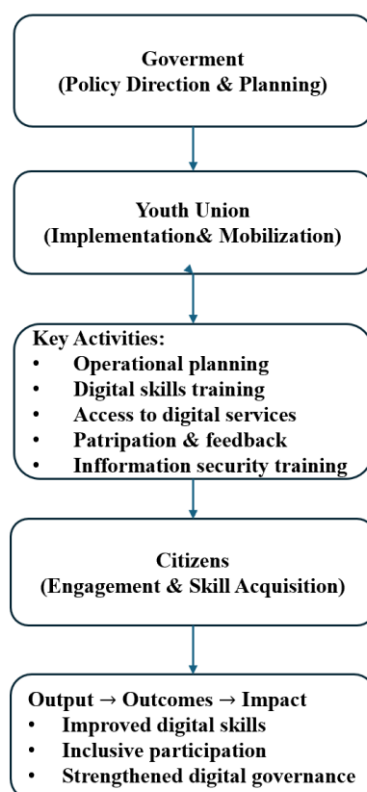
### ***Participative Management Theory***

Participative Management Theory was developed by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard in 1969 during their research on organizational behavior management. According to this theory, participative (or supporting) management is identified as one of the four leadership styles

proposed by the authors. Accordingly, participative management is understood as a leadership style that provides support and encouragement while sharing decision-making authority with employees who demonstrate high competence and a strong commitment to change.

In this study, the Youth Union and local residents are regarded as key actors participating in the construction of a digital society (including digital citizens and digital culture). In particular, the Youth Union serves as the core force within Community Digital Technology Teams and is considered to have been entrusted by authorities at various levels with the governance of community digital technology. Accordingly, a research framework for measuring community digital governance is proposed, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Analytical framework for participative governance in community digital technology



Source: Ministry of Information and Communications (2022) and the author's elaboration.

Based on the above analytical framework, this research focuses on measuring and analyzing the level of participation of Youth Union officials in community digital technology governance and the effectiveness generated by this governance model in three provinces and municipalities in Southeast Vietnam during the early stages of implementing the National Digital Transformation and building a digital society.

### 3. Data and Research Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Data

Ho Chi Minh City, Binh Duong, and Dong Nai hold strategically important geo-economic and political positions in Southeastern Vietnam. In the context of the National Digital Transformation, these three localities play a significant role in

formulating strategies and organizing their implementation in ways that are aligned with local characteristics, thereby contributing to the achievement of both local digital government development and national digital transformation goals.

According to the national Digital Transformation Index (DTI) rankings for provinces and municipalities nationwide, in 2022, Ho Chi Minh City, Binh Duong, and Dong Nai were ranked 2nd, 22nd, and 43rd, respectively (Table 1). Ho Chi Minh City remains among the leading group of 61 provinces and municipalities, outperforming Binh Duong and Dong Nai in the organization and implementation of digital transformation over the past year.

Table 1. Digital Government Transformation Rankings in Ho Chi Minh City, Binh Duong, and Dong Nai, 2022

| DTI Indicators (DTI)    | Ho Chi Minh City | Binh Duong | Dong Nai |
|-------------------------|------------------|------------|----------|
| Digital Awareness       | 35               | 1          | 44       |
| Digital Institutions    | 1                | 15         | 35       |
| Digital Infrastructure  | 1                | 9          | 17       |
| Digital Human Resources | 25               | 9          | 42       |
| Cybersecurity           | 17               | 41         | 33       |
| Digital Transformation  | 2                | 22         | 43       |
| Digital Government      | 2                | 8          | 45       |

Source: Compiled by the author on February 27, 2024 <sup>(3)</sup>.

Immediately following the issuance of the official guidance by the Ministry of Information and Communications in 2022, Community Digital Technology Teams were established nationwide. According to statistics from the Ministry of Information and Communications, as of August 31, 2022, a total of 45,895 Community Digital Technology Teams, comprising 211,737 members, had been established in 51 out of 63 provinces and cities in the country (as cited in Thu An, 2022).

By the end of the third quarter of 2024, Ho Chi Minh City had established 2,620 Community Digital Technology teams with a total of 11,059 members participating in communication, awareness-raising, and provision of support for

local residents in digital transformation activities (Lê Mỹ, 2024). In the case of Binh Duong Province, in the first six months of 2024, establishment of 101 volunteer youth teams and groups to participate in community digital transformation and support online public services across the province, including 1 provincial-level team, 9 district-level teams, and 91 commune-level teams. These teams handled more than 1,500 online administrative dossiers per day on average. In Dong Nai Province, according to Nguyễn Minh Kiên, Secretary of the Dong Nai Provincial Youth Union, aimed to leverage the spirit of initiative and volunteerism among young people, Youth Union members have voluntarily participated as members of more than 1,000

Community Digital Technology teams across hamlets and residential areas. These teams have engaged in communication, mobilization, and support for local residents in participating in digital transformation activities, such as downloading online payment applications, conducting buying and selling activities on e-commerce platforms, and installing and using applications for online learning, news consumption, and entertainment...

(Communist Youth Union Executive Committee of Dong Nai Province, 2023: 8).

### 3.2. Research Methodology

To examine the participation and governance of Community Digital Technology Teams by Youth Union officials in Southeastern Vietnam, this research conducted a survey of 360 Youth Union officers (referred to as “officers”) from July to October 2023 across three representative localities:

Ho Chi Minh City, Binh Duong, and Dong Nai<sup>1</sup>. Ho Chi Minh City ranks second nationwide in digital government development; Binh Duong ranks eighth, distinguished by numerous innovative solutions; while Dong Nai, considered a lagging area in terms of access to digital technologies, ranks 45th in digital government development despite implementing several practical solutions.

Using a questionnaire-based survey with an equal allocation of 120 responses per locality, the sample comprised 49.7% female (179 officers) and 50.3% male (181 officers) (Table 2). A stratified convenience sampling method based on administrative levels was employed, including commune/ward level (53.6%), district level (34.7%), and provincial/municipal level (11.7%). The surveyed officers were aged between 21 and 39, with work experience ranging from 1 to 16 years.

Table 2. Gender Distribution of Respondents by Provincial and Municipal Youth Union (Survey Data)

|        | Ho Chi Minh City<br>Youth Union |       | Binh Duong<br>Provincial Youth Union |       | Dong Nai<br>Provincial Youth Union |       | Total |       |
|--------|---------------------------------|-------|--------------------------------------|-------|------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
|        | n                               | %     | n                                    | %     | n                                  | %     | n     | %     |
| Male   | 60                              | 50,0  | 51                                   | 42,5  | 70                                 | 58,3  | 181   | 50,3  |
| Female | 60                              | 50,0  | 69                                   | 57,5  | 50                                 | 41,7  | 179   | 49,7  |
| Total  | 120                             | 100,0 | 120                                  | 100,0 | 120                                | 100,0 | 360   | 100,0 |

Source: Compiled from the 2023 survey results.

Drawing on governance-participation theory, social capital theory, and the concept of the digital society operationalized through the Digital Government Pillar Index (within the Provincial Digital Transformation Index (DTI), as stipulated in Decision No. 922/QĐ-BTTTT dated May 20, 2022, issued by the Ministry of Information and Communications) the survey examines the participation and responsiveness of Youth Union officers based on the following criteria: (i) development of operational plans; (ii) provision of digital skills training; (iii) guidance on access to and use of digital services; (iv) facilitation and mobilization of participation and policy feedback; and (v) training in information security skills. The

study employs a five-point Likert scale (1 = very low; 2 = low; 3 = medium; 4 = high; 5 = very high) to measure the level of participation of Youth Union officers across these criteria. In addition, a total of 30 in-depth interviews were conducted with Youth Union officers, with 10 randomly selected participants from each locality.

To evaluate the effectiveness of community digital technology governance by the Youth Union, the research draws on secondary data from reports of Youth Union organizations (Ho Chi Minh City Youth Union, Dong Nai Provincial Youth Union, and Binh Duong Provincial Youth Union), as well as primary data obtained from in-depth interviews

with Youth Union officers across the three localities.

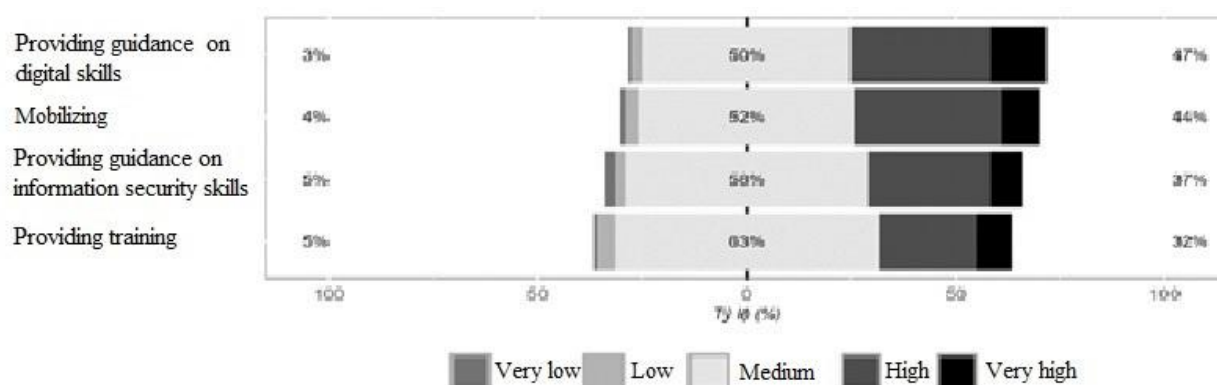
#### 4. Results and Discussion

##### 4.1. The Ho Chi Minh City Youth Union: Governance and Participation in Community Digital Technology

The survey results indicate a relatively high participation rate, exceeding 81%. Including Designing activity plans for Community Digital Technology teams is 81.7%; Providing digital skills training for local residents is 86.7%; Providing local residents with guidance on accessing and using

digital utility services such as online public services, e-commerce platforms, electronic payments, and mobile applications is 97.5%; Guiding and mobilizing local residents to contribute ideas and feedback on digital transformation 88.3%; and Providing information security skills training for local residents is 89.2%. Accordingly, the level of performance fulfillment of Youth Union members in activities of Community Digital Technology teams was generally assessed as medium or higher. Notably, approximately 30% - 40% of respondents rated the level of fulfilment as high or very high for specific activities (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Responsiveness in Community Digital Technology Governance and Participation among Youth Union Officers in Ho Chi Minh City (unit: %)



**Note:** The figures on the right of the figure represent the cumulative percentages of the two levels: “high” and “very high.” The figures in the center indicate the average percentage. The figures on the left represent the cumulative percentages of the two levels: “low” and “very low.”

**Source:** Survey results, 2023.

With regard to the outcomes of community digital technology governance by the Ho Chi Minh City Youth Union, according to Report No. 142-BC/TĐTN-VP dated November 30, 2023, issued by the Ho Chi Minh City Youth Union, In response to community-oriented digital transformation activities, the City Youth Union has organized a series of peak action days, including the campaign “Volunteer Youth Participating in Digital Transformation” and activities aligned with the Central Youth Union’s peak action day themed “City Youth Volunteers Supporting Citizens in Using Online Public Services, Handling Administrative Procedures, and Building Urban Civility”. These activities attracted participation of a total of 1,022,589 Youth Union members, young

people, and local residents. Through the volunteer program “Support for Community Digital Transformation”, which contributes to the “Project on Developing the Applications of Population Data, Digital Identification, and Electronic Authentication for National Digital Transformation for the 2022 - 2025 period with a vision toward 2030”, the Youth Union of the Ho Chi Minh City Cadre Academy has taken primary responsibility for regular activities in 17 wards across Binh Thanh District, Phu Nhuan District, and District 12. The program involved 227 volunteers who supported 10,050 people in installing the VNeID application and integrating essential personal information, such as identity cards, health insurance cards, driver’s licenses, and

motorcycle and motor vehicle registration certificates (Ho Chi Minh City Youth Union, 2023).

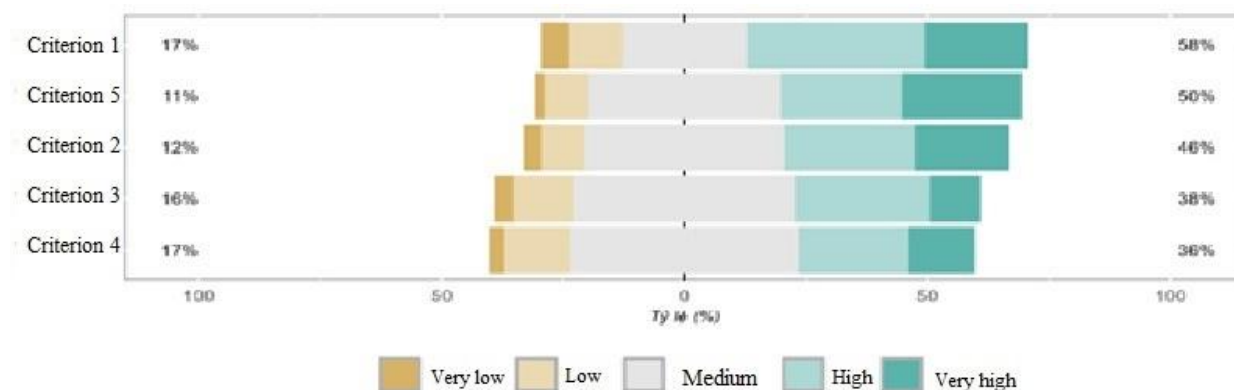
The survey findings and local reports indicate that the participation of Youth Union officers in Binh Duong is notably high, ranging from 81% to 97.5%, with responsiveness levels between 30% and 40%. The Youth Union has adopted diverse organizational approaches that attract broad participation from various social groups, including young people and the general population. Notably, they have introduced initiatives organized as thematic movements with specific activity focuses, enabling the mobilization of large numbers of citizens, in addition to cases requiring support through formal channels coordinated with local authorities.

#### 4.2. The Binh Duong Youth Union: Governance and Participation in Community Digital Technology

The survey results on participation in community digital technology governance under the Binh

Duong Provincial Youth Union indicate that Youth Union members have participated at a rate exceeding 75%. Among these, the participation rates in activities related to the second criterion “Providing digital skills training for local residents” (86.7%) and the third criterion “Providing local residents with guidance on accessing and using digital utility services such as online public services, e-commerce platforms, electronic payments, and mobile applications” (87.5%) were far higher than those in activities related to other criteria. Although participation rates among Youth Union members in Binh Duong were lower than those in Ho Chi Minh City, the level of performance fulfillment, which was assessed as “high” and “very high” (ranging from 38% to 58%), surpasses that in Ho Chi Minh City. Meanwhile, the overall level of fulfillment, which was assessed as “medium” or higher, was lower than that in Ho Chi Minh City (ranging from 83.4% to 89%) (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Responsiveness in Community Digital Technology Governance and Participation among Youth Union Officers in Binh Duong Province (unit: %)



Source: Survey results, 2023.

Regarding the effectiveness of community digital technology governance in Binh Duong, according to Như Ngọc (2023), members of volunteer youth teams and groups have actively engaged in communication and awareness-raising to encourage local residents to use online public services. They have provided guidance on installing and using digital platforms and applications, such as the Binh Duong Public Service Portal, the “Binh Duong Digital” application, VNeID, and electronic

payment accounts. In addition, the volunteers have provided enterprises, household businesses, and local residents with guidance on registering for e-commerce platforms and using digital platforms and technologies to upload images, promote products, and commit to providing products of assured quality to customers... As a result, they have supported and guided 15,349 local residents in using online public services at the Provincial Public Administration Center. At the district and

commune levels, more than 278,616 local residents and business representatives have received support and guidance from the volunteer youth teams in accessing and using online public services.

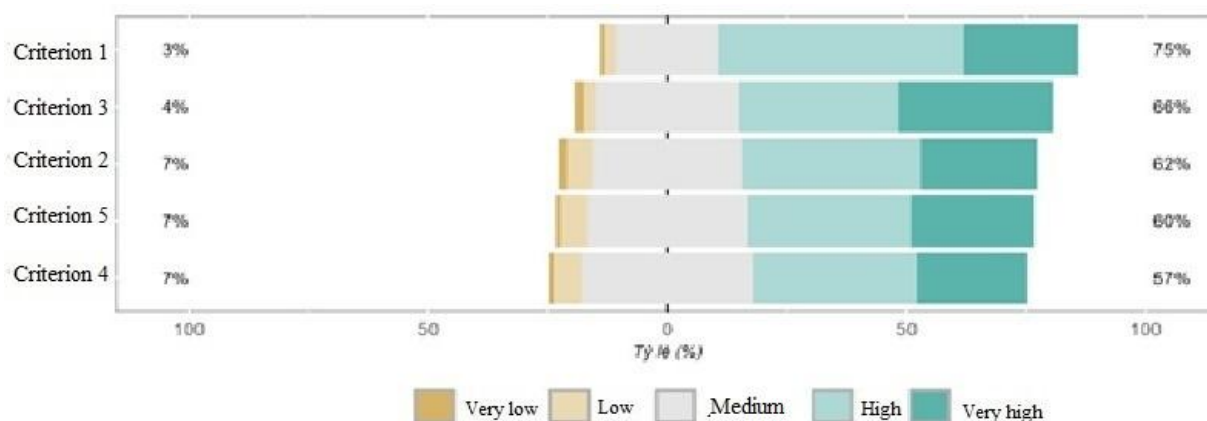
Survey findings and local reports indicate that the participation of Youth Union officers in Binh Duong is notably high, ranging from 75% to 87.5%, while responsiveness levels remain moderate, at 38% to 58%. The number of citizens supported and introduced to digital technologies has reached nearly 300,000 within a relatively short implementation period. In addition, this group has demonstrated proactiveness and innovation through the development of applications to support governance and community service.

#### 4.3. The Dong Nai Youth Union: Governance and Participation in Community Digital Technology

Regarding the participation and coordination in Community Digital Technology teams by members

of the Dong Nai Provincial Youth Union, the survey results show a very high level of involvement. Specifically, the participation rates across the five criteria were 97.5%, 95.8%, 97.5%, 97.5%, and 87.5%, respectively. Among these, “Designing activity plans for Community Digital Technology teams”, “Providing digital skills training for local residents”, “Providing local residents with guidance on accessing and using digital utility services”, and “Mobilizing local residents to contribute ideas and feedback on digital transformation” were the most prevalent activities. “Training in information security skills for local residents” recorded the lowest participation rate (87.5%). Overall, both the participation and the level of fulfilment among members of the Dong Nai Provincial Youth Union were higher than those in Ho Chi Minh City and Binh Duong, particularly at the “high” and “very high” levels, which ranged from approximately 57% to 75% (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Responsiveness in Community Digital Technology Governance and Participation among Youth Union Officers in Dong Nai Province (unit: %)



Source: Survey results, 2023.

With regard to the effectiveness of community digital technology governance in Dong Nai, An Hã (2024) notes that efforts have been made to closely align digital transformation with the Summer Youth Volunteer Campaign, the Dong Nai Provincial Youth Union set up volunteer groups for community digital transformation and the “Digital Summer Program”, aimed to integrate closely Youth Union activities with digital transformation.

These groups operated from June to August with a mission of coordinating with Youth Union organizations and Community Digital Technology teams in disadvantaged areas to disseminate the Party’s and State’s guidelines, policies as well as the outcomes of the National Digital Transformation Program. In parallel, a number of teams composed of enthusiastic and responsible high school students, university students, teachers, and young

lecturers with knowledge and skills in information technology were also established. To ensure effectiveness and practical impact, Youth Union members received training and capacity building, while monitoring and supervision were also conducted regularly during implementation to enable timely adjustments and the handling of practical situations (An Hà, 2024).

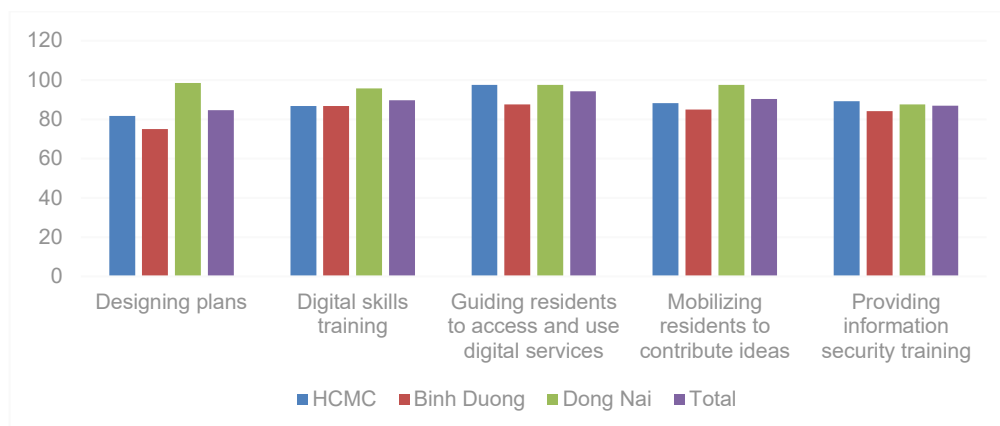
The participation, responsiveness, and effectiveness of digital technology governance by the Youth Union across the three provinces and municipalities collectively reflect the overall landscape of participatory digital governance in Southeast Vietnam. As reported by a ward-level Youth Union Secretary in Dong Nai Province, efforts to update digital identification data and promote the installation of the VNeID application yielded encouraging outcomes, including in communes affected by the “digital divide,” primarily as a result of the proactive training and guidance delivered by Community Digital Technology teams and volunteer digital transformation groups in providing training and guidance to local residents.

Survey findings and local reports indicate that the participation of Youth Union officials ranges from 87.5% to 97.5%, while response rates range between 57% and 75%, exceeding those recorded in the other two surveyed localities. This group is actively engaged across a full range of activities, including communication and outreach as well as the provision of digital skills training for residents, particularly in remote, underserved, and socioeconomically disadvantaged areas. Within a

relatively short period, digital competencies have been widely disseminated among the population, achieving broad coverage.

The participation, level of responsiveness, and effectiveness of digital technology governance by the Youth Union across the three provinces reflect an overall picture of participatory digital technology governance in the Southeast region. Each locality demonstrates creativity in organization and implementation. Youth Union members in all these three areas have participated actively throughout the entire process, from planning to implementation, with participation rates ranging from 84.3% in designing activity plans to 86.9% in providing information security training, 89.7% in digital skills training, 90.3% in mobilizing local residents to contribute ideas, and reaching the highest level at 94.2% in guiding local residents (Figure 4). The level of performance fulfilment of Community Digital Technology teams, which was assessed from “medium” to “very high”, was also quite high, ranging from 89.3% in mobilizing local residents to contribute ideas and feedback on digital transformation to 90.6% in designing activity plans, 91.6% in providing digital skills training for local residents, and 92.3% in guiding local residents to access and use digital utility services as well as in providing information security skills training. Moreover, in the process of building digital government (the core pillar driving the development of the digital economy and digital society), the Youth Union has been involved from the very early stages of the implementation of local digital transformation programs.

Figure 4. Advisory and Participation in Implementation of Community Digital Technology teams  
(unit: %)



Source: Survey results, 2023.

At the same time, the survey has also identified a range of other activities in which Youth Union members actively participate, including: Disseminating guidelines, policies, announcements, and plans of the Party, the State and local governments via commune-level Youth Union Facebook fanpages; Using QR codes at historical and cultural sites; Promoting cashless transactions at small retail outlets; Participating actively in Volunteer Saturdays; Digitizing data of meetings (e.g., attendance tracking and meeting documents); Minimizing the use of paper-based documents; Applying software for electronic document transfer and processing as well as online document storage; Providing guidance on how to use digital platforms and technological applications; and, Supporting local residents and household businesses in conducting electronic payments through QR code-based payment systems.

In local digital technology governance, young officials across the commune and ward, district, and provincial and municipal levels play a significant role; they constitute the vanguard force in implementation and are decisive for success in the emerging context shaped by information technology and artificial intelligence. According to a ward-level Youth Union Secretary: “The responsibility of Youth Union members is to take the lead in communication and outreach to local residents. [...] Currently, in our ward, administrative public services are increasingly handled entirely through online systems. There are not only young

but also elderly people coming for administrative matters. As youth, we have been assigned responsibilities by the Party Committee and the People’s Committee. We have organized a team at the One-Stop Service Center to provide support for local residents. For those who are somewhat familiar with smartphones, we provide basic guidance so they can continue on their own. For elderly people, we often carry out the procedures directly, such as creating accounts, and writing down information on small notes to be kept by them, and then guiding them step by step” (MS 06, male, 29 years old, Ward Youth Union Secretary, Dong Nai). However, alongside youthful enthusiasm and the advantage of responsiveness to information technology, Youth Union members participating in community digital technology governance also encounter certain barriers, including those related to technological platforms and equipment, working conditions, and the digital competencies of Youth Union officials. According to a female official with seven years of experience, responsible for one-stop administrative services at the provincial level, “together with technological equipment that adequately meets requirements, officials digital knowledge and skills are very important. At present, some of our members serving citizens are only at the level of implementation; they are able to deliver services, having only “just touched upon” them, but are not yet “proficient” (fully competent). What is important is to be proficient in information

technology skills, and positions that require specialization need to be trained in relevant fields” (Interview, CV03).

Through provision of support, Youth Union members have learned about situations in each village and neighborhood as well as local digital capacity and culture among local residents. Alongside favorable conditions, such as broad public willingness to participate in digital transformation and a strong demand for guidance on technological utilities, there are some significant barriers, including: Hesitation and reluctance to engage with information technology; Limitations resulting from health and age, which hinder adaptation among older residents; Shortages of personal digital devices; and, constraints in digital infrastructure... Survey data in 2023 indicate that limited digital skills among local residents (46.9%) and a low proportion of people possessing digital devices such as computers and smartphones (46.9%) constitute a major challenge in the digital transformation process and the development of digital government at the local level.. In-depth interviews with Youth Union officials involved in supporting citizens at the local level also reveal challenges in community digital technology governance from the citizens’ side: “Citizens still face difficulties in digital transformation. Specifically, even at the stage of data entry at level 2, many people, although they have mobile phones, are not necessarily familiar with using them. There should be additional support services for citizens, such as internet cafés, to better meet requirements in terms of technological equipment and digital skills” (Interview, CV04, male, official). During the process of training and guiding citizens, Youth Union members also encounter considerable difficulties. Therefore, it is necessary to combine communication with direct guidance: “When guiding citizens, difficulties also arise as they are not yet familiar with the operations. It is therefore necessary not only to communicate but also to provide an ‘environment’ for citizens to experience in order to form habits; once they recognize the benefits, they will adopt these practices” (Interview, CV05, male, in charge of movement work).

Based on survey data and in-depth interviews with the very actors involved in community digital technology governance, combined with secondary data from local reports, the findings reveal the current state of community digital technology governance in the three provinces and cities in the Southeast Vietnam as follows:

Together with other social forces, the Youth Union serves as a principal force participating in the development of digital government in Ho Chi Minh City, Binh Duong and Dong Nai, with relatively high participation rates ranging from 84.3% to 94.2%; and the majority of them meet the requirements for digital transformation and digital government development (89.3% to 92.3%), although there are only minor differences among the three provinces and cities.

The involvement of Youth Union members in community digital technology governance constitutes a governance model originating from an initiative of the central government, which has been formalized into official documents for implementation across provinces and cities nationwide. Members participating in community digital technology governance are trained to develop digital competencies and a readiness to serve the community.

Community Digital Technology Teams play a vital role as a bridge between local governments and people in disseminating information and raising awareness about digital transformation. They directly engage in communication, mobilization, guidance, and support for local residents in using smart technology applications, e-commerce platforms, and online public services, as well as participating in digital transformation across various domains of social life. As such, these teams make a substantial and direct contribution to the development of digital government, the digital economy, and digital culture in every local area.

In the operation of the participatory community digital technology governance model, certain constraints arise from the digital competencies of the workforce, implementation conditions including technological platforms and equipment, as well as the attitudes and habitual practices of citizens, who require time to become familiar with

and adapt to new modes of engagement. While these factors partially constrain effectiveness, they are not widespread and can be progressively addressed.

The effectiveness of the community digital technology governance model, with Youth Union members as the core force guiding citizens to acquire digital skills and enhance digital competencies in the early stage of national digital transformation implementation in the Southeast region, provides a basis for its adaptation in other localities and countries under conditions similar to those of Vietnam.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The Youth Union is a vanguard force with distinct advantages in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, making significant contributions to the success of digital transformation programs at both local and national levels. Based on the results achieved in participatory digital technology governance at the community level in the three provinces in the Southeast Vietnam, it is necessary to replicate this governance model nationwide. At the same time, to enhance effectiveness and further promote the role of Youth Union members, it is necessary to implement comprehensive and coordinated solutions, including improvements in institutional and regulatory frameworks; digital human resource training; technology investment; the development and application of digital platforms; and the building of digital culture. Equally important are effective organizational solutions and incentive mechanisms to encourage and motivate the core force of Youth Union members. To enhance the role of the Youth Union in Community Digital Technology teams, the following recommendations are proposed:

(i) It is essential to continue Community Digital Technology teams in the spirit of “going door to door and reaching every household” so as to provide direct support for local residents in digital transformation through practical activities such as: installing software, using digital devices, updating national databases and applying digital platforms, for the purpose of contributing to the development

of digital government and the advancement of the digital economy and digital culture.

(ii) It is also necessary to continue improving the institutional and regulatory framework for Community Digital Technology teams, including revising and supplementing organizational regulations to clearly designate the Youth Union as the core force, with other actors participating in coordinated implementation. At the same time, assigned tasks and incentive mechanisms should be institutionalized to provide a legal basis for local governments to implement these initiatives effectively.

(iii) Based on practical conditions, local authorities should apply incentive mechanisms to encourage active Youth Union members with strong digital competencies to participate in Community Digital Technology teams, thereby assisting local residents in improving their digital capacities to meet demands of the digital era.

(iv) Replicate and disseminate successful local-level models that have achieved positive outcomes, as well as effective organizational innovations and best practices, so that these experiences can be learnt and applied in other localities.

Each Community Digital Technology team should develop an effective action plan, review experiences regularly, and apply feasible measures that are appropriate to local conditions, neighborhoods and villages. In order to meet the demands of rapidly evolving digital technologies, members of Community Digital Technology teams should continuously engage in self-learning, independent research and innovation to enhance digital skills and competencies.

## NOTES

<sup>(1)</sup> The survey data are drawn from a ministry-level research project entitled “*Role of Youth Union Officers in Digital Transformation for Building Digital Government: A Case Study of Ho Chi Minh City, Binh Duong and Dong Nai*” (2023–2024), led by the author.

<sup>(2)</sup> Official Dispatch No. 606-CV/TĐTN-BMT.ANQP.ĐBDC on promoting the role of Youth Union in introducing, supporting, and connecting agricultural products of youth

individuals and collectives; and Official Dispatch No. 608-CV/TĐTN-BMT.ANQP.ĐBDC on supporting disadvantaged hamlets in the development of new rural areas, advanced new rural areas, and model rural communities.

<sup>(3)</sup> At the meeting held on December 27, 2023, the Provincial People's Committee organized a three-level online conference (provincial, district, and commune levels) to implement the plan for organizing youth volunteer teams and groups that would participate in community digital transformation in Binh Duong Province for the period 2023–2025.

### Author Contributions

**1<sup>st</sup> Author** conceived the study, developed the theoretical framework, and wrote the initial draft of the manuscript. **2<sup>nd</sup> Author** contributed to the

conceptual development, critically revised the manuscript, and provided important intellectual input. Both authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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### Statement of Ethics

This study is based on publicly available data, policy documents, and secondary sources. It does not involve direct experimentation on human participants. All information used in this research has been handled in accordance with ethical standards in social science research.

### Disclosure Statement (Conflict of Interest)

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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