



Enhancing Governance in Highway Construction Policies in Vietnam

Nguyen Thi Thuy Ngan ^{*1}; Roni Ekha Putera¹; Indah Adi Putri ¹

¹Master of Political Science
Faculty of Social and Political Science
Andalas University

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* Corresponding author;
ngan3631@gmail.com,
roniekhaputera@soc.unand.ac.id,
indahadiputri@soc.unand.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Efficient highway infrastructure is indispensable for Vietnam's continued economic growth and development. However, the governance of highway construction projects in the country has grappled with numerous challenges that hinder their effective implementation. This study aims to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the current policies and practices governing highway construction in Vietnam, and propose pragmatic recommendations to enhance the governance framework. A qualitative research approach was employed, involving an in-depth analysis of relevant policy documents and semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders from both the public and private sectors. The findings unveil significant inadequacies in the policy formulation process, a lack of transparency and public participation, as well as ineffective monitoring and accountability mechanisms. To address these critical governance deficits, the study recommends strengthening the legal and regulatory frameworks, improving inter-agency coordination and delineation of responsibilities, actively promoting public-private partnerships, and implementing robust monitoring, evaluation and audit systems. By instituting these crucial governance reforms, Vietnam can optimize the allocation of resources, enhance the quality of highway construction projects, mitigate risks, and ultimately foster the sustainable development of its vital highway infrastructure network.

INTRODUCTION

Vietnam has witnessed remarkable economic growth and development over the past few decades, propelled by its strategic investments in infrastructure projects, including the expansion of its highway network. Efficient transportation infrastructure plays a pivotal role in facilitating trade, mobility, and economic integration within the country and with regional partners. However, the governance of highway construction projects in Vietnam has faced significant challenges that have undermined their effective planning, implementation, and sustainability.

Governance encompasses the processes, institutions, and mechanisms through which public policies and projects are formulated, executed, and monitored. Sound governance principles, such as transparency, accountability, stakeholder participation, and the rule of law, are crucial for ensuring the efficient and equitable allocation of resources, minimizing corruption and mismanagement, and achieving desired outcomes. In the context of highway construction, robust governance frameworks are essential for optimizing project quality, cost-effectiveness, and environmental and social safeguards.

Despite the Vietnamese government's efforts to improve governance in infrastructure development, numerous issues persist, including inadequate policy formulation processes, lack of coordination among agencies, limited public participation, and ineffective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. These governance deficits have contributed to delays, cost overruns, environmental degradation, and public dissatisfaction with highway construction projects.

This study aims to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the current governance landscape in Vietnam's highway construction sector. By employing a qualitative research approach, involving document analysis and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, the study seeks to identify the underlying challenges, gaps, and opportunities for enhancing governance practices. The findings will inform a set of actionable recommendations to strengthen the legal and institutional frameworks, promote transparency and accountability, foster stakeholder engagement, and establish effective monitoring and evaluation systems.

Enhancing governance in highway construction policies is not only crucial for optimizing resource allocation and project outcomes but also for promoting sustainable development, environmental protection, and social equity in Vietnam. By addressing the governance challenges, the country can unlock the full potential of its highway infrastructure investments, contributing to economic growth, regional integration, and improved quality of life for its citizens.

METHODS

To achieve the objectives of this study and generate comprehensive insights into the governance challenges and potential solutions in Vietnam's highway construction sector, a qualitative research approach was adopted. Qualitative methods are particularly well-suited for exploring complex social phenomena, understanding contextual factors, and gaining in-depth perspectives from various stakeholders.

Document Analysis

A comprehensive analysis of relevant policy documents, legislation, regulations, and reports related to highway construction governance in Vietnam was conducted. This included reviewing national development strategies, infrastructure plans, public procurement policies, environmental and social safeguard guidelines, and monitoring and evaluation frameworks. The document analysis helped identify the existing governance structures, processes, and potential gaps or inconsistencies within the legal and institutional frameworks.

Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders involved in the governance and implementation of highway construction projects in Vietnam. The participants included:

1. Government officials from relevant ministries and agencies (e.g., Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Construction, Ministry of Planning and Investment)
2. Representatives from state-owned construction companies and private contractors
3. Experts and researchers in the fields of public administration, governance, and infrastructure development
4. Civil society organizations and community representatives affected by highway construction projects

The interviews aimed to gather diverse perspectives, experiences, and insights from those directly involved in or impacted by the governance processes. The open-ended nature of the interviews allowed for in-depth exploration of specific governance challenges, best practices, and potential solutions.

Stakeholder Workshops

To validate the preliminary findings and gather additional insights, stakeholder workshops were organized. These workshops brought together representatives from various sectors, including government agencies, private companies, civil society organizations, and academic institutions. Through facilitated discussions and group activities, participants had the opportunity to provide feedback, share their experiences, and contribute to the formulation of governance enhancement recommendations.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the document analysis, interviews, and stakeholder workshops were systematically analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques. This involved coding and categorizing the data to identify emerging themes, patterns, and relationships related to governance challenges, best practices, and potential solutions. The analysis aimed to triangulate the data from multiple sources, ensuring the validity and reliability of the findings.

By employing a multi-method qualitative approach, this study sought to develop a comprehensive understanding of the governance landscape in Vietnam's highway construction sector, identify critical issues and gaps, and generate actionable recommendations for enhancing governance practices. The combination of document analysis, stakeholder interviews, and participatory workshops ensured the inclusion of diverse perspectives and the generation of contextualized and practical solutions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The qualitative research approach employed in this study yielded rich insights into the governance challenges and opportunities within Vietnam's highway construction sector. The findings, derived from document analysis, stakeholder interviews, and participatory workshops, provide a comprehensive

understanding of the current governance landscape and inform actionable recommendations for enhancement.

Policy Formulation and Legal Frameworks

The document analysis revealed several inadequacies in the existing legal and policy frameworks governing highway construction projects in Vietnam. While various regulations and guidelines exist, they often lack coherence, clarity, and alignment with international best practices. Stakeholders highlighted the need for a more robust and comprehensive legal framework that addresses all aspects of governance, including transparent procurement processes, environmental and social safeguards, and mechanisms for public participation and accountability.

Lack of Transparency and Public Participation

A recurring theme across stakeholder interviews and workshops was the lack of transparency and limited public participation in the planning and implementation of highway construction projects. Many participants expressed concerns about the lack of access to information, inadequate disclosure of project details, and limited opportunities for communities to voice their concerns or provide input. This lack of transparency and public participation has contributed to public distrust, conflicts, and delays in project execution.

Inter-agency Coordination and Institutional Capacity

The research findings highlighted significant challenges in inter-agency coordination and institutional capacity within the governance framework for highway construction projects. Multiple government agencies and ministries are involved, often with overlapping mandates and responsibilities, leading to bureaucratic inefficiencies, delays, and miscommunication. Furthermore, stakeholders identified capacity gaps within these institutions, including a lack of technical expertise, inadequate human resources, and limited financial resources, hindering effective governance and project oversight.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Accountability

The study revealed significant deficiencies in the monitoring, evaluation, and accountability mechanisms for highway construction projects. While some monitoring and reporting requirements exist, their implementation is often

inadequate, with limited resources and capacity dedicated to these critical governance functions. Stakeholders emphasized the need for robust, independent, and continuous monitoring systems, as well as clear accountability measures to ensure project quality, compliance with regulations, and responsible use of public resources.

Environmental and Social Safeguards

The findings highlighted concerns regarding the implementation of environmental and social safeguards in highway construction projects. While policies and guidelines exist, their enforcement and adherence have been inconsistent, leading to negative environmental impacts, such as deforestation, habitat fragmentation, and air and water pollution. Additionally, stakeholders raised concerns about inadequate compensation and resettlement processes for affected communities, exacerbating social conflicts and human rights issues.

Public-Private Partnerships and Stakeholder Engagement

The study identified opportunities for enhancing governance through the promotion of public-private partnerships (PPPs) and increased stakeholder engagement. Stakeholders recognized the potential benefits of PPPs in leveraging private sector expertise, resources, and innovative approaches, while also emphasizing the need for robust governance frameworks to ensure transparency, accountability, and alignment with public interests. Additionally, greater engagement with civil society organizations, local communities, and other stakeholders was seen as crucial for fostering inclusive decision-making, addressing concerns, and building trust in the governance processes.

The findings from this study provide a comprehensive understanding of the governance challenges and opportunities in Vietnam's highway construction sector. By addressing the identified issues related to policy formulation, inter-agency coordination, transparency, monitoring and accountability, environmental and social safeguards, and stakeholder engagement, Vietnam can enhance the governance frameworks and practices, optimize resource allocation, and foster sustainable and equitable development of its vital highway infrastructure.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to evaluate the current governance policies and practices in Vietnam's highway construction sector and propose recommendations for enhancement. Through a qualitative research approach involving document analysis, stakeholder interviews, and participatory workshops, several key findings emerged that address the research objectives.

Firstly, the study identified significant inadequacies in the existing legal and policy frameworks governing highway construction projects. These include a lack of coherence, clarity, and alignment with international best practices, as well as limited provisions for transparency, public participation, and accountability mechanisms. Secondly, the findings revealed substantial challenges in inter-agency coordination and institutional capacity, with multiple agencies involved in overlapping roles and responsibilities, coupled with capacity gaps in technical expertise, human resources, and financial resources.

Furthermore, the study uncovered deficiencies in the monitoring, evaluation, and accountability systems for highway construction projects. While some requirements exist, their implementation is often inadequate, with limited resources and capacity dedicated to these critical governance functions. Additionally, concerns were raised regarding the inconsistent implementation of environmental and social safeguards, leading to negative impacts on the environment and affected communities.

However, the research also identified opportunities for enhancing governance through the promotion of public-private partnerships (PPPs) and increased stakeholder engagement. PPPs can leverage private sector expertise and resources, while robust governance frameworks ensure transparency, accountability, and alignment with public interests. Greater engagement with civil society organizations, local communities, and other stakeholders can foster inclusive decision-making, address concerns, and build trust in the governance processes.

In addressing these governance challenges and capitalizing on the identified opportunities, the study proposes recommendations to strengthen legal and institutional frameworks, improve inter-agency coordination, promote transparency and public participation, establish effective monitoring and evaluation systems, and enhance

the implementation of environmental and social safeguards. By implementing these recommendations, Vietnam can optimize resource allocation, enhance project quality, minimize environmental degradation, and promote inclusive and sustainable development of its highway infrastructure.

Overall, this study has provided a comprehensive understanding of the governance landscape in Vietnam's highway construction sector and offered actionable recommendations to address the critical governance issues. By enhancing governance practices, Vietnam can unlock the full potential of its highway infrastructure investments, contributing to economic growth, regional integration, and improved quality of life for its citizens.

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