



Reorganization and Streamlining of Commune-Level Administrative Units in Ben Tre Province, Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, Ben Tre province has systematically and comprehensively implemented Resolution No. 18-NQ/TW, issued on October 25, 2017, at the Sixth Plenum of the 12th Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam. This resolution sets an important goal of innovating and restructuring the political system to be streamlined, effective, and efficient. This article comprehensively analyzes the strategy for restructuring and streamlining commune-level administrative units in Ben Tre province. The authors clarify the current status over the past years and examine the impacts and challenges faced by the province during the implementation process. Furthermore, the article proposes solutions and recommendations to enhance the efficiency of commune-level administrative streamlining efforts. These solutions will improve government efficiency, better meet the needs and aspirations of citizens, and facilitate the province's socio-economic development in the context of integration and modernization.

KEYWORDS: Ben Tre province, restructuring, streamlining, commune-level administrative units.

I. INTRODUCTION

Currently, modernizing national governance with high efficiency and effectiveness is a key task for local governments to enhance state governance. Modern national governance not only ensures the smooth operation of administrative and legal structures but also serves as a foundation for continuous improvement and innovation. In this context, developing a dedicated, competent, and responsible workforce alongside an efficient and streamlined public administration system plays a crucial role.

However, the proliferation of new administrative units in recent years has led to an increase in the number of government structures, affecting governance efficiency. In Ben Tre province, many commune-level administrative units are small and fragmented, making long-term planning and socio-economic development difficult. This situation hampers the allocation of resources and regional economic development, especially as decentralization policies empower local governments with more autonomy and responsibility.

The fragmentation of administrative units further restricts localities from focusing on socio-economic development and improving the quality of life for citizens. Therefore, restructuring substandard commune-level administrative units must align with the goal of reforming

and streamlining the political system for greater effectiveness. This will contribute to downsizing the workforce, reforming salary structures, restructuring public personnel, and improving the quality of officials and civil servants, thereby creating a more effective administration that serves the people efficiently.

II. CURRENT SITUATION OF REORGANIZING AND STREAMLINING COMMUNE-LEVEL ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS IN BEN TRE PROVINCE

A. Commune-Level Administrative Units in Ben Tre Province (2018-2023)

Table 1: Commune-Level Administrative Units in Ben Tre Province (2018-2023)

Year	Total Units	Communes	Wards	Townships
2018	164	147	10	07
2020	157	142	08	07
2023	157	139	08	10

Source: Compiled data, 2024

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In 2018, following multiple administrative boundary adjustments since 1997, Ben Tre province had 164 commune-level administrative units, including 147 communes, 10 wards, and 7 townships. By 2020, per Resolution No. 856/NQ-UBTVQH14 (issued February 10, 2020) by the Standing Committee of the National Assembly, Ben Tre's commune-level administrative units were reduced to 157, comprising 142 communes, 8 wards, and 7 townships—a net decrease of 7 units.

In 2023, Resolution No. 724/NQ-UBTVQH15 (issued February 13, 2023) established three new townships: Tien Thuy (Chau Thanh district), Tiem Tom (Ba Tri district), and Phuoc My Trung (Mo Cay Bac district). While the total number of commune-level units remained at 157, the internal structure changed, with a reduction of 3 communes and an increase in townships from 7 to 10. This reflects urbanization trends in specific areas of the province, supporting economic and infrastructural development. Compared to 2020, the total number of commune-level administrative units in the province remains unchanged. However, the number of communes has decreased by three, while the number of townships has increased from seven to ten, an increase of three units.

Although the total number of administrative units has not changed, there has been a significant internal restructuring. The reduction in the number of communes and the increase in the number of townships reflect the trend of urbanization in certain areas of the province. This can be seen as a step forward in promoting economic and social development, as upgrading from a commune to a township provides better conditions for improving infrastructure and enhancing the quality of public services for residents.

B. Restructuring and Streamlining of Commune-Level Administrative Units in Ben Tre Province (2023-2025)

Ben Tre Province has developed Proposal No. 4038/ĐA-UBND, issued by the Provincial People's Committee on June 25, 2024, to reorganize commune-level administrative units during the 2023-2025 period. This proposal aligns with the spirit of Resolution No. 37-NQ/TW,

dated December 24, 2018, of the Politburo regarding the reorganization of district- and commune-level administrative units, as well as Conclusion No. 48-KL/TW, dated January 30, 2023, of the Politburo on continuing the restructuring process for the 2023-2030 period.

The proposal not only aims to streamline the administrative apparatus but also seeks to improve the quality of life for residents while preserving and promoting the traditional cultural values of the homeland and the nation—an extremely important objective. Additionally, it encourages wards and communes to take the initiative in the restructuring and organization process, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of Party committees, local governments, and political-social organizations. As a result, the quality of commune-level officials and civil servants will be improved, better meeting the demands of socio-economic development and ensuring local defense and security.

1. Number of Commune-Level Administrative Units to be reorganized:

According to Ben Tre Province's plan for reorganizing commune-level administrative units, a total of 12 units will undergo restructuring. These include 8 communes, 3 wards, and 1 town. Among them, 9 units fail to meet the statutory requirements for natural area and population size, with compliance levels below 50% of the standard. Specifically, Wards 4 and 5, along with the communes of An Hoa, An Phuoc, Son Hoa, Phu Nhuan, Phu Vang, Tan My, and Chau Thanh Town, are on this list. This highlights the necessity of restructuring these administrative units to improve operational efficiency and better serve the people of the province.

Table 2: Number of Commune-Level Administrative Units in the Province after Rearrangement

No.	Name Of Administrative Unit	Number Of Administrative Units After Rearrangement		Number Of Units Reduced
		Total	Commune	
1	Ba Tri District	22	20	-
2	Chau Thanh District	16	14	-
3	Giong Trom District	21	20	-
4	Mo Cay Nam District	16	15	-
5	Binh Dai District	19	18	-
6	Thanh Phu District	18	17	-
7	Ben Tre City	12	06	06
8	Mo Cay Bac District	13	12	-
9	Cho Lach District	11	10	-
TOTAL	148	132	06	10

Source: The People's Committee of Ben Tre Province (2024)

2. The number of commune-level administrative units after the reorganization

Thus, after completing the reorganization of commune, ward, and town administrative units in Ben Tre province during the 2023-2030 period, the total number of administrative units will be reduced by nine. At the same time, there will be a significant increase in the population and average area of these units. Specifically:

After the mergers, the population of communes has increased from 6,000-8,000 people per commune to 16,003 people per commune (corresponding to an increase of 8,003 to 10,003 people per commune). The average area of communes has also expanded from 1,000-1,500 km² to 2,251.5 km² (an increase of 751.5 km²).

Similarly, the population of wards after the mergers has increased from 8,000-10,000 people per ward to 25,516 people per ward (with an increase of 15,516 to 17,516 people per ward). The average area of wards has also increased by 0.79 km².

For towns, the population after reorganization has increased from 5,000-7,000 people per town to 15,604 people per town, corresponding to an increase of 8,604 to 10,604 people per town. The average area of towns has also increased by 0.304 km².

These figures not only reflect the effectiveness of the administrative unit reorganization but also demonstrate the streamlining of the administrative system, enhancing the ability to serve the people and creating favorable conditions for local socio-economic development.

C. Some Impacts and Challenges of the Reorganization and Streamlining of Commune-Level Administrative Units in B n Tre Province

1. Impacts:

After implementing the reorganization of commune-level administrative units in B n Tre province, not only has the policy aligned with the Party and State’s directives for national development, but it has also created numerous opportunities for economic growth, improved living standards, and optimized local resources. Some positive impacts following the implementation of the plan include:

Firstly, the efficiency of local government administration has improved. Merging communes with small areas and low populations helps reduce the number of administrative units, thereby concentrating management resources and minimizing fragmentation in governance. For example, after Phu An Hoa and An Hoa communes were merged into An Phuoc commune, the total area and population size increased, facilitating long-term development planning and reducing administrative fragmentation.

Secondly, the workforce has been streamlined, and the competency of the administrative staff has improved. The reduction in the number of communes, wards, and townships through mergers helps rationalize the number of officials and civil servants, thereby lowering administrative

management costs and freeing up resources for other tasks. For example, after Phu Vang commune was merged into Loc Thuan commune, the administrative workforce was streamlined, allowing Ben Tre province to effectively implement this policy. At the same time, the province can focus on training and improving the quality of the remaining civil servants, ensuring they have the necessary capabilities to manage the newly formed administrative units.

Thirdly, budget savings and more efficient resource utilization have been achieved. Reducing the number of administrative units means lower costs for maintaining office buildings, equipment, and overall management. After Tan My commune was merged into My Hoa commune, only one office building needed to be maintained instead of multiple offices as before. The funds saved from administrative cost reductions can be redirected toward local development projects such as infrastructure construction, education, healthcare, and other public services.

Fourthly, fostering more sustainable socio-economic development. After the communes were merged into larger administrative units, key transportation routes such as National Highway 60 and National Highway 57B were reorganized, facilitating connectivity and economic growth. The merger of An Hiep and Son Hoa communes into Tuong Da commune also contributed to making the An Hiep industrial zone a key development hub, attracting both labor and businesses.

Fifthly, improving public service delivery for local residents. The government can better plan and manage essential public services thanks to the administrative restructuring. Larger communes formed after the mergers will have more resources and stronger management capacity, enabling them to provide public services in a more transparent and efficient manner.

Even though the restructuring of commune-level administrative units in Ben Tre province brings many positive benefits, the process also presents several significant challenges. Specifically:

Firstly, difficulties in stabilizing the administrative system after the merger. When communes, wards, and towns are consolidated, the administrative apparatus requires time to adapt. Disruptions in leadership and staff positions may create challenges in assigning new responsibilities. In particular, communes with differences in size, culture, or working styles may struggle to integrate their operations. Some officials may lose their jobs or be reassigned to positions that do not match their expertise, leading to a decline in motivation. This issue is especially prominent in smaller communes merging into larger ones, where leadership positions become more limited.

Secondly, inconvenience for residents in administrative transactions. After the merger, some residents in affected communes and wards may have to travel farther to reach the new administrative offices. This poses difficulties, especially for the elderly, low-income individuals, or those

with limited mobility. For example, after Tan My commune merged into My Hoa commune, residents living on the outskirts of Tan My now have to travel a longer distance to complete administrative procedures

Thirdly, challenges in restructuring infrastructure and public services. After the merger, the demand for upgrading infrastructure—such as administrative offices, transportation, electricity, and water—will increase. However, budget constraints may prevent immediate improvements, leading to service disruptions or suboptimal quality during the initial phase.

Lastly, potential economic development imbalances. During the consolidation process, communes with stronger economies may receive priority investment over weaker ones, creating disparities in economic growth. For example, when An Khanh commune merges into Chau Thanh town, resource allocation for infrastructure and economic development may favor Chau Thanh due to its greater growth potential. This could reduce the development momentum of the merged communes, leading to regional inequalities within the province.

2. Challenges:

Firstly, difficulties in achieving community consensus. One of the biggest challenges is the lack of agreement from local communities and government officials in the merged administrative units. Residents often have a deep emotional attachment to their hometowns, and changes in administrative boundaries may cause anxiety, fear of losing cultural identity, and concerns about the loss of local autonomy. Government officials in the affected communes may also worry about their job positions, leading to resistance or a lack of cooperation during the transition.

To address this, the government must implement an effective communication strategy to clarify the benefits of the merger while addressing the concerns of both residents and officials. If communication efforts are inadequate, the consolidation process may face resistance and a lack of public support.

Secondly, the arrangement and management of civil servant positions. After the merger, many leadership positions in the consolidated communes may become redundant, particularly roles such as the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Commune People's Committee, as well as heads of local departments and mass organizations. Local authorities must handle this situation appropriately, but it remains a sensitive issue that could lead to negative reactions from officials who are reassigned or dismissed.

Each commune has a workforce with varying levels of expertise, experience, and capabilities, making it a major challenge to allocate tasks and coordinate personnel efficiently. If not managed properly, this could result in overlapping responsibilities, conflicts, or inefficiencies within the new administrative structure.

Thirdly, financial resource allocation. Many communes in Ben Tre Province have limited budget revenues, relying primarily on central government subsidies.

Following the merger, budget allocation for the newly formed communes presents significant challenges, particularly in ensuring adequate funding for infrastructure development and public services.

Additionally, balancing economic and social development resources across merged communes can be difficult. Larger or strategically located communes may receive priority investment, while smaller or more remote areas could face disadvantages in accessing resources. This imbalance could lead to disparities in development within the province.

III. SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT STREAMLINING IN BẾN TRE PROVINCE

A. Solutions

First, conducting surveys and gathering community feedback. To address concerns regarding the reorganization of commune-level administrative units, local authorities should organize voter meetings. These meetings should focus on specific concerns of residents, such as travel distances and the quality of public services after the merger. Additionally, regular public dialogues and community meetings should be held, allowing residents to express their opinions and receive direct responses from the government.

The results of surveys and public feedback should be carefully analyzed to adjust the merger plan if necessary, ensuring transparency and community engagement. Finally, survey results and subsequent adjustments should be publicly disclosed to strengthen trust and gain public consensus on the restructuring project.

Second, addressing personnel-related issues. A detailed plan should be developed for rearranging, transferring, and reallocating personnel after the mergers. The goal is to ensure that no one is left behind and that everyone is given opportunities to work in positions that match their skills and expertise. Furthermore, supportive policies should be implemented to assist civil servants during the transition, including retraining programs, job reassignment, and creating favorable conditions for them to adapt to the new working environment.

Third, developing a detailed implementation roadmap and allocating resources appropriately. Establishing a clear implementation roadmap and properly allocating resources are crucial factors in ensuring the effectiveness of commune-level administrative unit restructuring. The government should create a comprehensive plan that outlines each specific implementation step, with clear timelines and assigned responsibilities for relevant agencies. Financial resource allocation must be carefully calculated, including costs for restructuring administrative offices, retraining personnel, and investing in infrastructure. Additionally, human resources should be utilized efficiently, ensuring that transferred officials are placed in roles that align with their expertise and capabilities. To maintain progress, a strict monitoring mechanism should be

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established, along with flexibility to adjust the roadmap when challenges arise. Effective coordination between government levels and active community participation will be key factors in ensuring that resources are allocated appropriately and the restructuring process runs smoothly.

B. Recommendations

1. Government:

The government should develop guidelines tailored to the specific conditions of each locality, especially rural, remote, and island communes like those in Bến Tre. Special provisions should be made for island and remote communes to avoid rigidly applying criteria related to area and population.

Additionally, the government should allocate additional budget support for provinces facing difficulties, such as Ben Tre, particularly to cover the costs of constructing and upgrading administrative offices, transportation systems, and public services in communes after the merger. This financial support will help ease the burden on local authorities and improve service quality for residents.

2. Ministry of Home Affairs:

The Ministry of Home Affairs should organize specialized training programs for Ben Tre officials on post-merger administrative management processes. Experts should also be assigned to assist the province during the implementation phase to address emerging issues promptly, such as adjusting the functions of new administrative units and reallocating personnel.

Furthermore, the Ministry should establish flexible policies for transferring and retraining officials and public employees in merged communes to ensure smooth operations. Clear guidelines should be provided to manage personnel redundancies and facilitate job transitions for affected officials.

3. People's Committee of Ben Tre Province:

The Provincial People's Committee needs to develop a reasonable and flexible merger roadmap, prioritizing communes with good infrastructure and high community consensus before expanding to more challenging areas. This approach will not only reduce pressure on the administrative system but also support local residents. At the same time, the Provincial People's Committee should proactively establish an effective cooperation mechanism between departments and agencies to ensure that resources are utilized efficiently, particularly in adjusting management functions and reallocating personnel. This will help prevent overlapping responsibilities and inefficiencies in implementing the project.

4. People's Councils and People's Committees at all levels:

The People's Councils and People's Committees at all levels should conduct regular public outreach and dialogue sessions with residents of merged communes to listen to their opinions and clearly explain the objectives and benefits of the restructuring. This will not only help minimize

opposition but also foster grassroots consensus. Additionally, district and commune-level authorities should take the initiative to review and plan for upgrading or constructing new administrative offices to ensure that residents do not face difficulties in accessing public services after the merger. Furthermore, transportation support measures should be in place for people living in remote areas far from the new administrative centers to facilitate their transition.

The restructuring of commune-level administrative units in Ben Tre Province is a necessary step toward streamlining the state administrative apparatus, enhancing local government efficiency, and improving public service quality for residents. Reducing the number of small administrative units will help concentrate resources, strengthen management capacity, drive socio-economic development, and enhance people's livelihoods. However, the restructuring process also presents challenges, such as difficulties in achieving community consensus, personnel rearrangement, and financial resource allocation. Some residents may be concerned about changes in administrative boundaries, while government officials may be affected by job reassignments. To address these issues, authorities must implement effective solutions, including strengthening communication efforts, organizing public dialogues to gather feedback and provide timely responses, and ensuring the rational allocation of resources. These measures will help ensure a smooth merger process without significantly disrupting local governance and development.

IV. CONCLUSION

The restructuring and streamlining of commune-level administrative units in Ben Tre Province, Vietnam, is a crucial policy aimed at enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of state governance, optimizing the administrative apparatus, and utilizing resources more rationally. This process helps reduce administrative overlap, creates favorable conditions for socio-economic development, and improves public service quality. However, alongside its benefits, the merger also presents challenges in stabilizing organizational structures, ensuring the rights of officials and civil servants, and facilitating public adaptation. To maximize effectiveness, a well-planned roadmap, consensus among government levels and citizens, and appropriate support mechanisms are essential. When implemented correctly, administrative streamlining will lay a solid foundation for Ben Tre's sustainable development in the new phase.

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