

ON THE CONCEPT OF WASTED OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstract: *Wasted opportunities refer to situations in which subjects fail to recognize and capitalize on favorable conditions or advantages that arise at a particular moment in time, thereby failing to act in a way that achieves their desired goals. On a national scale, wasted opportunities are among the primary causes of slow development, both economically, socially, and culturally...In Vietnam, to prevent and combat the waste of opportunities and to successfully realize the national goals of becoming by 2030 a developing country with a modern industrial base and upper-middle income, and by 2045 a developed, high-income nation, several key measures must be implemented: Formulate socio-economic development strategies and medium- and long-term national development plans in a comprehensive, consistent, and coherent manner; Build a cultural environment that encourages creativity and tolerates risk within acceptable limits; Develop human resources, strengthen education and training; Raise awareness among individuals and institutions to build a culture that prevents waste; And enhance international cooperation.*

Keywords: *waste, opportunity, Vietnam*

1. The concept of “opportunity”

According to the *Vietnamese Dictionary*, *cơ hội* (opportunity) is “a favorable circumstance encountered to do something one often desires” (Institute of Linguistics 2010: 286). In this sense, an opportunity can be understood as a favorable context, condition, or environment that enables people to take action to achieve their goals or change circumstances in a positive direction. Opportunities do not always appear clearly or visibly; sometimes they are hidden, fleeting, and difficult to grasp. This requires broad vision, deep insight, and decisive action.

Seizing opportunities is not only the key to success but also reflects the vision, courage, and intellect of individuals, organizations, or nations.

It is also important to distinguish between opportunity and luck. Luck refers to coincidence or random chance, often passive in nature. Opportunity, by contrast, implies agency the ability to recognize and act upon favorable conditions to achieve one’s goals. For example, the development of science and technology, artificial intelligence, digital transformation, and the rising

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demand for high technology present opportunities for developing countries to attract investment, transform their growth models, and promote socio-economic development, as well as the emergence of new industries. However, to successfully capitalize on such opportunities, nations must make careful and deliberate preparations investing in human resource development, improving institutional frameworks, and upgrading infrastructure. Moreover, countries must proactively identify and seize opportunities, rather than simply waiting for “luck” to arrive, as in the saying “waiting for a ripe fruit to fall”. Globalization, for instance, presents opportunities for countries to expand their markets and attract investment. To fully utilize these opportunities, each nation must actively prepare through institutional reform and human capital development.

Opportunities, if utilized effectively, can bring many benefits to individuals, organizations, and nations. However, opportunities are not always correctly recognized or efficiently taken advantage of; on the contrary, in many cases and at many times, opportunities have not been seized promptly or used effectively in other words, they have been wasted.

The term waste (*lãng phí*) is commonly understood as “causing unnecessary loss or expense” (Institute of Linguistics 2010: 700) or, in a more formal sense, “inefficient management and use of capital, assets, labor,

time, and resources”. Or it is “... the ineffective management and use of capital, assets, labor, working time, and natural resources. In fields where norms, standards, and regulations have been issued by competent state authorities, waste refers to the management and use of the state budget, state capital, state assets, labor, and working time in the public sector, and natural resources in ways that exceed prescribed norms, standards, or regulations, or that fail to achieve established goals” (Law on Thrift Practice and Waste Prevention, Article 3, Clause 2).

Thus, it can be seen that wasting opportunities means *that subjects (individuals, organizations, communities, or nations) fail to recognize and capitalize on favorable conditions that arise at a given time, thereby hindering their ability to act toward achieving desired goals*. In other words, the waste of opportunities refers to neglecting or failing to capitalize on favorable circumstances that could bring substantial benefits to the subject. In this article, the waste of opportunities is examined from both national and ethnic perspectives that is, considering the waste of opportunities in relation to national development.

Typically, the waste of national development opportunities often lies hidden beneath, or manifests through, other forms of waste. In other words, the waste of opportunities is multifaceted. Wasteful use of high-quality human resources is one manifestation of

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the waste of national development opportunities, given the crucial role and importance of this resource to national growth. A nation cannot fully exploit or maximize its advantages and potential without a workforce capable of utilizing and leveraging the advantages and potential of other resources for development. Similarly, the waste of natural resources, public assets, or waste in production and consumption also constitutes a waste of opportunities for national development, as the accumulation of material foundations and the economical use of resources are necessary conditions for a nation's growth. Without material foundations, infrastructure, and resources, no country can advance. Wasting time is also a manifestation of wasting national development opportunities. When people spend time on useless or meaningless work, they lose the time needed to engage in productive and creative activities that generate material and spiritual wealth for society. When citizens, producers, and businesspeople must spend excessive time handling complicated administrative procedures, they have less time for production and business, causing opportunities for development to slip away.

Policies enacted too late or implemented ineffectively after enactment are also expressions of wasted opportunities. An incomplete, inadequate, or impractical institutional system that fails to meet the demands of reality hampers economic activities,

scientific progress, and innovation; it leads to resource leakage, suspended planning projects, and similar inefficiencies all of which represent forms of wasted opportunities.

The waste of opportunities leads to grave consequences, causing national stagnation and slowing development in economic, social, cultural, defense, and security aspects; it may even result in prolonged inertia.

The waste of opportunities is not merely the loss of a chance for the country to make significant progress in economic, social, cultural, educational, scientific, or diplomatic fields. It also impedes the realization of desired goals, diminishes and depletes the nation's development potential, and undermines its international standing. The waste of opportunities also results in "brain drain" and the loss of talented individuals, due to the lack of an environment that encourages development and dedication. Moreover, it hinders collective progress and erodes public trust in state governance. President Hồ Chí Minh once emphasized: "Although it is not theft of public property like embezzlement, waste also causes loss and damage to both the people and the government" (Hồ Chí Minh 2011, vol. 7: 297); and that "Embezzlement is harmful, but waste can sometimes be even more harmful: it is more dangerous than embezzlement because it is widespread waste of property, time, and the strength of the people and the government" (Hồ Chí Minh 2011, vol.

7: 345). He likened waste to a form of “internal enemy”: “Embezzlement, waste, and bureaucracy are a kind of ‘enemy within.’ “ If soldiers and the people strive to fight the external enemy but forget to fight the internal one, they have not yet fulfilled their duty. Therefore, soldiers and the people must enthusiastically participate in this movement” (Hồ Chí Minh 2011, vol. 7: 362).

There are various causes leading to the waste of opportunities. Fundamentally:

First, at certain times, individuals or organizations hesitate to make or propose decisions, lacking courage and decisiveness out of fear of making mistakes, fear of failure, or fear of judgment, and thus do not dare to do things differently.

Second, there may be a failure to correctly perceive existing opportunities or to accurately assess situations, leading to the loss of the best choices; or, even when opportunities are recognized, there may be insufficient resources to act upon them.

Third, the absence of clear development plans causes the country to fall into disorientation and fail to seize opportunities provided by external contexts. The slow formulation, promulgation, and implementation of policies or policies that do not keep pace with reality combined with ineffective social management amidst global transformations, all contribute to missing opportunities for national development.

Fourth, the lack of creativity and innovation prevents the country from capitalizing on the opportunities brought by scientific and technological progress. Innovation is a crucial driving force in socio-economic development; the absence of policies that encourage innovation and the failure to leverage technological advancements can leave a nation lagging behind and missing new opportunities for growth.

Fifth, incomplete institutions, short-term “tenure thinking,” and the lack of coordination among agencies and organizations can also render opportunities ineffective, even when they arise.

In Vietnam, recognizing the influence and impact of the waste of opportunities on national development, the Party and the State have paid great attention to preventing and combating waste. Resolution No. 04-NQ/TW, dated August 21, 2006, of the 3rd Plenum of the 10th Party Central Committee on “Strengthening the Party’s leadership over the work of preventing and combating corruption and waste” affirmed: “Preventing and combating corruption and waste are extremely important tasks in the cause of national construction and defense of our Party, State, and people” (Communist Party of Vietnam 2006). Conclusion No. 21-KL/TW, dated May 25, 2012, of the 5th Plenum of the 11th Party Central Committee, on the continued implementation of the 3rd Plenum Resolution (10th tenure)

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regarding “Strengthening the Party’s leadership over the work of preventing and combating corruption and waste” further emphasized: “Preventing and combating corruption and waste are difficult and complex tasks, important and regular duties of our Party, State, and people in the cause of national construction and defense” (Communist Party of Vietnam 2012).

The Politburo Directive No. 27-CT/TW, dated December 25, 2023, on “Strengthening the Party’s leadership over thrift practice and the fight against waste” further affirms that this “is a central and regular task of the entire political and social system, first and foremost of Party committees, Party organizations, and each agency, unit, and locality; it is also a cultural attitude of every cadre, Party member, civil servant, public employee, and citizen especially of leaders and managers contributing to improving the efficiency of mobilizing, allocating, and using socio-economic resources for national development and improving the people’s quality of life” (Politburo 2023: 2). *The Documents of the 13th National Congress* of the Communist Party of Vietnam further emphasize: “The work of preventing and combating corruption and waste is a particularly important task in building and rectifying the Party, and in building and consolidating a clean and strong political system, as well as in strengthening the great national solidarity bloc” (Communist Party of Vietnam 2021, Vol. I: 193).

On the basis of the Party’s viewpoints and orientations, and the State’s policies and laws, the work of preventing and combating the waste of opportunities in Vietnam has achieved certain results in recent years. The institutional framework has been increasingly improved from the economic sector to science and technology, and in the attraction and use of talents and intellectuals; some long-delayed planning projects have been resolved; and the administrative apparatus has been streamlined. “The effectiveness and efficiency of state management, and the exploitation and use of national resources, have been enhanced. The state budget has been tightly controlled from estimation to implementation and finalization; procurement, equipment, management, and use of assets, vehicles, and working facilities in agencies and organizations using the state budget have been conducted in accordance with prescribed norms, standards, and regimes; the management of investment projects using state capital and assets has seen positive improvements” (Tô Lâm 2024a).

However, alongside these achievements, the waste of opportunities still exists. Waste of natural resources, public property, and inefficiencies in economic and consumption activities continue to occur. A recent study revealed that: “Vietnam currently ranks second in the Asia-Pacific region in food waste, with more than 8 million tons of edible and usable food being

lost or discarded each year, causing a waste of approximately 3.9 billion USD. The rate of food waste in Vietnam is twice as high as that in advanced and wealthy countries around the world” (Hồ Nguyên Thảo 2022). The 13th National Party Congress Documents also emphasized: “The work of preventing and combating corruption and waste in some localities, ministries, and sectors has not yet shown clear improvement... Corruption and waste in several areas and fields remain serious and complicated, with increasingly sophisticated manifestations, causing frustration in society” (Communist Party of Vietnam 2021, Vol. I: 92–93).

Vietnam is now preparing to enter a new era the era of national rise, an “era of development and prosperity under the leadership and governance of the Communist Party, successfully building a prosperous, strong, democratic, just, and civilized socialist Vietnam, standing shoulder to shoulder with the world’s great powers... By 2030, Vietnam aims to become a developing country with modern industry and upper-middle income; by 2045, a developed socialist country with high income” (Tô Lâm 2024b). At present, Vietnam remains a developing country with a lower-middle income GDP. To achieve these goals amid global fluctuations and the vigorous progress of the Fourth Industrial Revolution which brings both opportunities and challenges for national development it is essential to avoid wasting opportunities and ensure

that Vietnam develops in line with its strategic plan. To that end, several key tasks should be implemented as follows:

First, build comprehensive, coherent, and flexible socio-economic development strategies and medium- and long-term national development plans, free from parochial interests or “tenure thinking”.

The formulation of these plans must be based on actual conditions and should include forecasts of possible scenarios covering natural, economic, social, and political factors both domestically and internationally. It is also necessary to prepare social management plans for extraordinary circumstances, enabling the nation to manage, govern, and respond flexibly to unpredictable risks and developments such as climate change, natural disasters, epidemics, and global fluctuations, as well as to capitalize on the opportunities these conditions may bring.

Second, to build a cultural environment that encourages creativity, seizing opportunities, empowerment, and risk acceptance within permissible limits. Creating such an environment is particularly important to minimize the waste of opportunities, as it fosters self-confidence and enables individuals, organizations, and communities to believe in their own abilities. It also provides opportunities to learn lessons from both success and failure, nurturing decisiveness and the spirit of daring to think and act. Failure should be viewed as an inevitable part of the development

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process. It is essential to encourage opportunity-seeking and calculated risk-taking, as without innovation and risk acceptance, it is difficult to seize new opportunities. At the same time, an equitable environment should be created so that everyone has the opportunity to develop and contribute to the common progress of society.

Third, develop human resources and strengthen education and training.

Education and training play a crucial role in developing high-quality human resources capable of acquiring knowledge, identifying opportunities, and turning potential into reality. Those with knowledge and broad understanding can cultivate strategic thinking, deep vision, and sound decision-making skills. President Hồ Chí Minh emphasized: “A nation that is ignorant is a weak nation”., “The more society advances, the more work there is to do, and the more sophisticated the machinery becomes. If we do not study, we will fall behind; and to fall behind is to be eliminated it is to eliminate ourselves”., “Whether the mountains and rivers of Vietnam can become beautiful, and whether the Vietnamese people can step up to the glorious stage to stand shoulder to shoulder with the great powers of the five continents, depends in large part on the efforts of our students in learning” (Hồ Chí Minh 2011, vol. 4: 7; Hồ Chí Minh 2011, vol. 12: 333; Hồ Chí Minh 2011, vol. 4: 35).

To fully unlock potential and advantages, and to prevent and combat

the waste of opportunities, it is essential to invest in learners with comprehensive and well-oriented knowledge, and equip them with skills and competencies that meet the requirements of development in the new context. The education system must be innovative, flexible, and connected to the labor market. Education and training should avoid rigid uniformity; instead, they must encourage critical thinking, creativity, and decision-making skills. In the context of the rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) today, it is necessary to equip students, university learners, and even current workers with digital literacy and foundational knowledge of AI. At the same time, it is crucial to foster the development of a learning society.

Fourth, develop science, technology, and innovation.

The development of nations has always been associated with industrial revolutions. Human history demonstrates that the progress and prosperity of many advanced countries have stemmed from their ability to seize and capitalize on the opportunities presented by industrial revolutions. For various reasons, Vietnam has “missed the train” of previous industrial revolutions. Therefore, if we fail to capitalize on the achievements of the current Fourth Industrial Revolution (Industry 4.0), we will once again miss the opportunity for national development. To avoid this, it is necessary to promote the development

of science, technology, and innovation. Accordingly, more investment should be allocated to science and technology, as well as research and development (R&D); experimental and innovative models should be encouraged, and a certain level of risk-taking and entrepreneurial spirit should be accepted. There should be appropriate incentive and reward policies for scientific and technological personnel, as well as for scientific organizations and enterprises engaged in research and innovation activities.

Fifth, raise awareness among all actors and build a culture of preventing and combating waste.

The waste of national development opportunities manifests itself in various forms at the individual, organizational, and community levels. Efforts to prevent and combat this waste can only succeed if each individual and organization fulfills their responsibility in preventing waste in general. President Hồ Chí Minh once emphasized: “We must resolutely fight against wastefulness in our agencies and in our daily activities” (Hồ Chí Minh 2011, vol. 7: 367). Accordingly, to avoid wasting opportunities, every individual must enhance their awareness of opportunities for personal and national development; actively study, train, and prepare the best possible conditions to seize the opportunities brought about by domestic and global progress. Every organization should build, develop, and implement effective personnel management, training, and digital

transformation strategies; practice good governance; and accept diversity and critical opinions. At the national level, it is necessary to improve institutions, make rational use of resources, and create conditions for each individual and organization to fully realize their potential and advantages.

Rules and standards on waste prevention should be established in all areas of life in organizations and communities, in the management of natural resources, and in the use of public assets. The inspection and supervision of anti-waste efforts must be conducted seriously and comprehensively.

Building a culture of preventing and combating waste must be closely linked with the culture of thrift. Only by saving time, effort, natural resources, and public assets can we accumulate the necessary resources so that, when favorable conditions and opportunities arise, these resources can be rationally used and effectively mobilized creating the foundation for the nation’s breakthrough development.

Sixth, strengthen international cooperation.

In the current context, international cooperation plays a crucial role in enabling each nation to expand its relations with other countries and international organizations. Through such cooperation, a country can broaden export markets, attract foreign investment, enhance competitiveness, improve the quality of human resources, and gain access to modern science,

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technology, and management skills while simultaneously strengthening its national position. To avoid wasting the opportunities brought by international cooperation, it is necessary to enhance internal capacity, perfect the legal and regulatory system to both ensure national and ethnic interests and comply with international standards; at the same time, renew the growth model, develop high-tech industries, and foster human resources with professional, technical, and language skills. Moreover, it is essential to protect cultural identity

so that integration does not lead to “assimilation”.

These solutions are interconnected and must therefore be implemented synchronously not only to prevent and combat the waste of opportunities but also to proactively create opportunities for rapid and sustainable national development, thereby realizing the goal of building “a prosperous people, a strong country, a democratic, just, and civilized socialist society, standing shoulder to shoulder with the great powers of the five continents”.

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