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# Gender Briefing Kit

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### **The Mission of the United Nations in Viet Nam**

The United Nations, in partnership with the government and people of Viet Nam, works to ensure that all Vietnamese people enjoy an increasingly healthy and prosperous life with greater human dignity and expanded choices. Collectively and through its individual agencies, the United Nations cares and creates opportunities for the poor and most vulnerable, and for youth, to whom the future belongs.

In accordance with the United Nations Charter and Millennium Declaration, the United Nations advances the principles of equality and social justice, while providing impartial advice, technical expertise, access to global knowledge and local experience to meet Viet Nam's development challenges.

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# Foreword

Ha Noi, October 2002

Global experience teaches us that nations which promote women's rights and increase their access to resources and educational opportunities will grow faster and enjoy lower poverty rates. But such equality only comes from action. Concrete steps must be taken to narrow existing gaps between women and men in terms of education, job opportunities, rights to property, access to credit, political voice and decision-making.

The United Nations Country Team believes that action for gender equality is an essential part of good governance; it ensures that everything that government does responds to the needs and interests of all members of society, and that benefits are distributed equitably between women and men. Progress towards gender equality is imperative if Viet Nam is to achieve its ambitious development targets. Whether it is the national Ten-Year Socio-Economic Development Strategy, its Public Investment Programme, or the recently completed Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy, gender inequality must be addressed squarely as a key underlying development issue in order for these strategies to reach their goals. This message is at the center of the United Nations *Gender Briefing Kit*.

This updated *Gender Briefing Kit* is based on an important shift in the global approach to achieving gender equality. We have learned that gender equality cannot be achieved by one group, or a few individuals acting alone. It can only be achieved where there is strong leadership, and broad commitment and action by government and development partners. The gender mainstreaming approach aims to change the way people and organizations think and work. It aims to ensure that the complexities and differences in men's and women's lives, their needs and priorities, are systematically and comprehensively considered and addressed at all levels, in all sectors, and at each stage of policy and program development and implementation. It is only when gender mainstreaming is successfully adopted and implemented, that we can begin to feel confident that policies and programmes will consider and address each person's needs and priorities, and that all Vietnamese people, men, women, girls, and boys, can participate in and benefit equally in the country's achievements.

The *Gender Briefing Kit* offers a timely snapshot of key gender issues and concerns in Viet Nam as viewed by the United Nations. It records recent findings on progress made for both women and men in such areas as enrolment in primary education, health and poverty reduction. It also details the increased vulnerability of women to violence – such as domestic violence and trafficking – as well as to continuing inequalities in wage earnings and workload burdens. There is also a separate chapter on gender issues in ethnic minority cultures since these groups are often vulnerable to a somewhat different set of problems.

We hope that the analysis and findings in the *Gender Briefing Kit* will encourage readers to examine gender relations in Viet Nam, compare the different roles, priorities, and needs of women in society with those of men, and understand the unequal power relations that exist between them. With such analysis, we may better anticipate the different impacts that policies and programs may have on both men and women, and address these concerns at the start of the program development and policy-making process and increase the likelihood that women and men will experience equal outcomes of the development process.

At the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000, Viet Nam, along with 188 nations of the world, adopted the Millennium Declaration and committed to achieve the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Among these MDGs, Goal 3, *Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women*, is best achieved if national policymakers and those working in development ensure that gender issues become a necessary and critical part of the development process. We hope that the *Gender Briefing Kit* helps to stimulate thinking about gender issues, inform this debate and create an impulse for concrete action.

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# Chronology of Events Relating to Gender Equality and Women

- 43 AD Trung sisters lead the first national uprising against the Chinese occupation of Viet Nam.
- 248 Lady Trieu leads a rebellion ousting the Chinese occupation.
- 1483 The Hong Duc Code of the Le Dynasty gives women equal inheritance rights, the right to divorce and protection from violence.
- 1930 Formation of Indochinese Communist Party and the Women's Emancipation Association (forerunner to the Women's Union).
- 1941 Foundation of the Women's Association for National Salvation.
- 1946 Article 9 of the First Constitution states: "All power in the country belongs to the Vietnamese people, irrespective of race, sex, fortune, class, religion..." and that "women are equal to men in all respects."  
The establishment of the Viet Nam Women's Union (VWU).
- 1950 Women's Association for National Salvation merges with the Viet Nam Women's Union and holds the first National Women's Congress.
- 1956 Second National Congress of Vietnamese Women.
- 1959 Article 24 of the Constitution states: "Women enjoy equality with men in all spheres of activities — political, economic, cultural, at home and in society. ... There should be equal pay for equal work... The state guarantees women employees fully paid maternity leave both before and after the birth."
- 1960 The first Marriage and Family Law emphasizes the principles of free choice of marriage partners, monogamy, equality between husband and wife and the protection of women's and children's interests.  
Third National Congress of Vietnamese Women.  
Formation of Union of Women for the Liberation of South Viet Nam.
- 1965 Women's Union launches the "Three Responsibilities" campaign.
- 1974 Fourth National Congress of Vietnamese Women.
- 1980 The Government of Viet Nam signs the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).  
Article 63 of the Constitution states: "The state and society ensure the development of maternity clinics, creches, kindergartens, canteens and other social facilities to create favourable conditions for women to work, rest and study."
- 1982 Ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).  
Fifth National Congress of Vietnamese Women.
- 1984 Penal Code Article 138: "Every form of violation of women's rights is to be punished."
- 1986 The new Marriage and Family Law prohibits early marriages (under 18 years of age for women and 20 years for men), and gives spouses equal rights regarding property and inheritance.



- 1987 Sixth National Congress of Vietnamese Women.
- 1988 Population and Family Planning Policy encourages each couple to have one or two children; suggests the age of the mother and father at the birth of their first child to be 22 and 24 in urban areas and 19 and 21 in rural areas; and states that spacing between children should be three to five years.
- Decision 163 of the Council of Ministers: "Authorities of every level should facilitate women's unions at the same level to involve and to be heard on the process of policy formulation, law drafting and planning concerning women and children."
- 1990 The Government of Viet Nam ratifies the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
- 1992 Article 63 of the new Constitution states: "Male and female citizens have equal rights in all respects — political, economic, cultural, social and the family. All acts of discrimination against women and all acts damaging women's dignity are strictly banned. Men and women shall receive equal pay for equal work. Women workers shall enjoy a regime related to maternity. Women who are State employees and wage-earners shall enjoy paid prenatal and post-natal leaves during which they shall receive all their wages and allowances as determined by law."
- Seventh National Congress of Vietnamese Women.
- 1993 Resolution 4 of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party puts forth the goals of "improving women's material and spiritual life," and "enhancing women's social status and the realization of their right to equality."
- 1994 Directive 37 of the Party Central Committee states that the Government and Party should aim to have at least twenty per cent of positions filled by women. All branches of state apparatus are required to improve gender awareness, formulate policies to develop women's skills, develop plans for (re) training women cadres, and increase the number of female employees.
- 1995 Article 20 of the Labour Code: "Everyone has the right to freely choose a profession and a place for apprenticeship suited to the need of future employment. All businesses, organisations and individuals who meet the conditions prescribed by law shall be allowed to open a job-training establishment."  
Article 110: "The State officers have the responsibility to devise diversified and convenient forms of training for women labourers so that besides their current jobs they can have reserve jobs and so that the use of female labour can become easier and more and more suitable as well as their motherly function."
- Viet Nam sends a delegation of eighteen to the United Nations Fourth Conference on Women in Beijing and the Government of Viet Nam signs the International Platform for Action and Beijing Declaration at this conference.
- 1996 Chapter 10 of the Ordinance of Labour protection outlines separate provisions for women. Article 113 bans women from work considered heavy or dangerous, such as working on ocean-going ships, oil rigs and operating cranes.
- 1997 In October, the Prime Minister of Viet Nam signs the National Plan of Action (POA) for the Advancement of Vietnamese Women by the Year 2000.



Eighth National Congress of Vietnamese Women held to set objectives, orientations, and tasks of the women's movement for the 1997-2002 period.

- 1999 Viet Nam lodges its Second Report on CEDAW with the United Nations. The Prime Minister announces (No. 207/TB/VPCP) the decision for ministries, branches and People's Committees to integrate gender into planning for the Ten-Year Socio-economic Development Strategy for 2001-2010.
- 2000 Viet Nam sends a delegation of 24 to the UN Beijing +5 Special Session in New York, to review the implementation of the international Platform for Action.

Revision of Marriage and Family Law, which includes additional provisions regarding ownership and inheritance in case of divorce and death. Article 27 is based on the common law, in which everything acquired before marriage is subject to an agreement while everything acquired after marriage is considered as a common asset. Land use rights acquired after marriage, therefore, require both names on the registration certificate.

Publication of the situation analysis of women and gender relations in Viet Nam. Collective work done by NCFAW and national researchers with recommendations from multilateral and bilateral donors.

- 2001 The Government of Viet Nam ratifies the 2000 Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography.
- 2002 Ninth National Congress of Vietnamese Women held to set objectives, orientations, and tasks of the women's movement for the 2002-2007 period.

National Strategy for the Advancement of Women in Viet Nam by 2010 endorsed by Prime Minister.

Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women in Viet Nam by 2005 approved.

# Gender Terminology

The Gender and Development approach, supported by Mainstreaming Gender Equality as a strategy, is relatively new as a means to promote and achieve gender equality. Like many Governments and organizations around the world, Viet Nam is in transition to gender equality as a goal, and mainstreaming gender equality as a strategy. The changes in the discussion and emphasis from a Women in Development (WID) approach (which focuses exclusively on women), to a Gender and Development (GAD) approach (which focuses on the unequal relations between women and men) have created some confusion. Key concepts such as 'gender', 'gender equality', 'mainstreaming women' and 'mainstreaming gender equality' remain unclear for many people.

For gender mainstreaming to be successful there needs to be a critical mass of people who understand the key concepts related to mainstreaming gender equality. A clear conceptual understanding of these issues is essential for government officers at all levels, but especially at the highest levels (eg, Party, National Assembly, Ministers), and other key economic and political ministries that determine national policy. When decision-makers have a clear understanding about gender mainstreaming, they are more likely to abandon the narrow focus on women, and adopt a gender perspective that takes into account the impact of men's roles and gender relations on inequalities between women and men.

## **GENDER – The Key Concept**

Gender does not mean our 'sex', and it does not mean 'women'. Our gender identity is not something that we were born with – we all learn it as small children and as we grow into adults. It is a collection of socially-learned behaviors and expectations about characteristics and aptitudes that are considered to define what it means to be a woman or a man (or a boy or girl) in a given society or culture. It is also about relations between women and men, who should do what, and who has control over decision-making, access to resources, and benefits. There is usually a lot of pressure on individuals to conform to these social expectations.

*Examples:* In some societies it is expected that only men will do the cooking (and that it is not appropriate for women), but in other societies it is women who are expected to cook. In other societies it is expected that men will kiss and hug each other when they meet and greet – but in other societies this is considered to be very inappropriate behavior. This is not a skill or behavior that we are born with. We learn what is considered to be appropriate to do (as males and females) in our community. This is our gender identity.

Gender identities and gender relations are critical aspects of culture because they shape the way daily life is lived in the family, but also in the wider community and the work place.

While the specific nature of gender relations varies considerably amongst societies, the general pattern is that women have less personal autonomy, fewer resources at their disposal, and limited influence over decision-making processes that shape their societies and their own lives. This pattern of disparity based on gender identities is both a human rights issue and a national development issue.

## **Gender Identities Are Dynamic**

Gender identities are different within communities and across the world. They change over time and in response to changing conditions and various factors (eg, social, economic, legal, policy, civil society). Importantly, societies and cultures are not static – they are living entities that are continually being renewed and reshaped. During this process of evolution some values are reaffirmed, while others are challenged as no longer appropriate.

## **GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION – The Problem**

Gender-based discrimination is when men or women are treated differently (restricted or excluded) in the family, in the workplace, in the society due to gender-stereotypes – which prevent them from enjoying their

full potential and human rights. Gender stereotypes are a set of characteristics that a particular group assigns to women or men – they are often incorrect, and usually limit what an individual can do.

*Examples:* Some common female stereotypes are that women are dependent, weak, passive, gentle, and less important. Some common male stereotypes are that men are independent, strong, competent, more important, and decision-makers. *These characteristics are clearly incorrect – but are commonly accepted as ‘the truth’.*

Gender-based discrimination often places women in an unequal, subordinate and disadvantaged position in relation to men. This occurs, for example, when women are denied job opportunities because the gender-stereotype is that men are better decision-makers. Gender-based discrimination also constrain men’s opportunity to participate in a range of activities such as caring for his family or choosing healthy behaviors, such as not smoking or drinking excessive amounts of alcohol.

### **GENDER EQUALITY – The Goal**

Gender equality does not simply mean equal numbers of men and women or boys and girls in all activities. Gender equality means that men and women enjoy equal recognition and status within a society. It does not mean that men and women are the same, but that their similarities and differences are recognised and equally valued.

Gender equality means that women and men experience equal conditions for realising their full human potential, have the opportunity to participate, contribute to, and benefit equally from national, political, economic, social and cultural development. Most importantly, gender equality means equal outcomes for men and women.

Gender inequality is both a major cause of poverty and a major constraint to sustainable development. Gender inequalities undermine development, ultimately harming all members of society. Societies with large, persistent gender inequalities pay the price of greater poverty, malnutrition, illness, and other deprivations. Economic growth is more effective in reducing poverty in societies that have higher levels of gender equality. The goal of gender equality therefore is both a critical human rights issue and an essential requirement for equitable, efficient, effective, and sustainable development.

### **GENDER MAINSTREAMING – The Strategy**

At the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 the concept of gender mainstreaming was established as the internationally agreed strategy for governments and development agencies to promote gender equality. This approach was developed in response to consistent lessons that have emerged from at least 20 years of experience in addressing women’s needs.

Mainstreaming gender equality is the facilitation of change and learning in an organisation so that it becomes better able to contribute to greater equality between women and men in meaningful and measurable ways<sup>1</sup>. It is an essential part of good governance; it ensures that everything that government does responds to the needs and interests of all members of society, and that benefits are distributed equitably between women and men.

### **What to Expect from Successful Gender Equality Mainstreaming**

Equal participation in the decision-making processes for setting priorities, and allocating resources by men and women

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<sup>1</sup> The Capacity Development Group, “Change Agent” September 2002, info@capacitydevelopment.net

Equal access to and control over society's opportunities, resources, and development outcomes by women and men  
 Equal recognition and status for men and women  
 Women and men enjoy equal human rights  
 Equal improvements in and standards of quality of life for women and men  
Reduction in poverty for both men and women as assessed through a range of indicators, especially those associated with areas where significant gender gaps exist  
 Improved effectiveness and efficiency of economic growth and sustainable development  
Equal outcomes of development for men and women, girls and boys

### **How Does the Strategy of Mainstreaming Gender Achieve these Successes?**

Women and men experience life differently, have different needs and priorities, and are affected differently by policies and development interventions.

Gender identities and gender relations are critical aspects of culture which impact on how men and women have different life experiences, because they shape the way daily life is lived in the family, but also in the wider community and the work place. While the specific nature of gender relations varies amongst societies, the general pattern is that women have less personal autonomy, fewer resources at their disposal, and limited influence over decision-making processes that shape their societies and their own lives.

As a result women, who constitute more than 50% of society, comprise the majority of people living in poverty globally, are victims of all types of violence, generally have lower literacy rates than men, and have experienced the least improvement in their quality of life. In some areas, male marginalization, especially amongst young people, is also a significant gender inequality issue.

The underlying cause of gender inequality is not the lack of women's integration in development, or their lack of skills, credit and resources, but the *social processes and institutions* that result in inequalities between women and men to the disadvantage of women.

The gender mainstreaming approach aims to challenge people and organizations at all levels to carefully consider the complex and differences in people's lives and their needs and priorities during all stages of policy and programme development and implementation. Only after policies and programmes incorporate and address each and every person's needs and priorities, will all Vietnamese people, men, women, girls, and boys, have a chance to participate in and benefit equally from the country's achievements and development process.

### **Who is Responsible for Mainstreaming Gender Equality?**

Gender equality cannot be achieved by one individual or one group, such as the Gender Focal Point, the Viet Nam Women's Union (VWU), or National Committee for the Advancement of Women (NCFAW). It can only be achieved where there is strong leadership, and broad commitment and action by all levels and sectors of Government. The principle is that redressing inequality is a shared responsibility by all government stakeholders.

The commitment and support of high-level leaders and senior managers to the process of gender mainstreaming is essential. This should be accompanied by clear messages on the importance of gender equality and gender mainstreaming, as well as concrete measures to hold staff accountable for taking action towards gender equality.

All persons responsible for designing, implementing, reviewing, monitoring and evaluating policies, projects, programs, and budgets are responsible for gender mainstreaming. It is necessary for them to: understand the different roles, responsibilities, experiences, and inequalities between women and men in relation to the issues being addressed; identify opportunities to actively involve women as well as men in the consultation

process; act on women's as well as men's priority concerns; identify ways to promote benefits for women as well as men; and identify strategies to reduce gender disparities and promote gender equality.

Gender focal points, and gender management units such as NCFAW and CFAW have a special role in advising on gender-equality policy and planning, developing organisational gender equality action plans, mechanisms, capacity, and in coordinating, monitoring and evaluating gender mainstreaming efforts.

### **Essential Conditions for Mainstreaming Gender Equality**

There are range of conditions that can promote the success of mainstreaming gender equality in organisations. Some of the critical factors include:

**Conceptual clarity:** A good understanding of the key concepts and ideas underlying gender equality and gender mainstreaming – by a critical mass of organization personnel, and especially amongst senior management.

**Leadership on gender mainstreaming from senior officials/management:** A strong and committed focus on gender mainstreaming by senior officials/management is critical. Only senior managers can properly oversee a cross-cutting theme which overlaps with the various management structures and areas of an organisation.

**Policy framework and strategic action plan:** Without a policy framework and strategic action plan, efforts towards gender mainstreaming can be random and unsuccessful. Most organisations (ministries, departments), and units within organisations, need a clearly defined and agreed gender mainstreaming strategy so that action can be coordinated and progress measured.

**Clear roles and responsibilities for all actors:** Any new task or new approaches to existing tasks, are more likely to be successfully carried out if everyone knows and understands exactly what is expected of them. Gender equality cannot be achieved by one group or a few people. It can only be achieved where there is strong leadership, and broad commitment and action by all parts of government or an organisation, at all levels and in all sectors. Key actors responsible for mainstreaming gender equality must be clear about their roles and responsibilities, and how their performance will be measured against this.

**Culture of change and learning:** Mainstreaming gender equality involves challenging the status quo. It means making changes in how we think, relate, and work, changing some of our long-held beliefs about the role and value of men and women. Successful change must involve top leadership and management – a fact that has been proven repeatedly around the global and especially in relation to mainstreaming gender equality. To achieve change, primary actors such as leaders, middle management and focal points for gender equality, must be willing to speak out about what needs changing, and how to do it, as well as be firm in promoting change for gender equality when others resist it. In the past there has been a tendency to offer a few selected staff a one-time gender training. We now know that well-planned gender training can only have an impact if it is carried out as part of an overall organizational strategy of change. Experience tells us that the development of conceptual understanding, practical expertise, and the ability to competently apply gender-mainstreaming skills is an incremental and ongoing process that takes time, high quality training support, and a work environment that demands and supports the application of gender mainstreaming by staff.

### **MAINSTREAMING WOMEN AND MAINSTREAMING GENDER EQUALITY**

These are two different but equally important approaches to mainstreaming gender equality. Mainstreaming women is often mistaken as mainstreaming gender equality.

Mainstreaming women emphasizes the need to increase women's active participation in mainstream activities, particularly in politics, leadership, governance and all decision-making processes, at all levels and in all sectors.

Mainstreaming gender equality is a more comprehensive approach that requires the differential impact on women and men to be identified for all policies, programs and interventions through, for example, gender analysis and gender statistics, so that inequalities can be eliminated.

Mainstreaming women and gender mainstreaming are equally important. Like men, women decision-makers can be blind to gender differences, and gender mainstreaming could occur with little or no participation from women.

Gender equality requires both an active role for women in decision-making, and a gender perspective (by male and female decision-makers) that takes into account the potentially different impact of policies and programs on women and men - and on different groups of women and men.

It is very important therefore, to strengthen capacity to integrate both women and a gender perspective into the mainstream when designing and reviewing policy, programmes, and projects.

### **FOCUS OF INTERVENTIONS – Practical Needs and Strategic Interests**

The distinction between short-term practical needs, long-term strategic interests, mainstreaming women and mainstreaming gender are important in designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating policies and projects.

**Practical needs** are concrete and often essential needs for human survival, such as food, water, shelter and health care. Attention to practical needs can address immediate disadvantages and inequality, but can also reinforce the gender division of labour by helping women and men perform their traditional roles better. Addressing practical needs usually does not change the traditional gender roles and stereotypes that contribute to gender inequality.

**Strategic interests** are those needs, that when met, will actually challenge and change power relations and division of labour between women and men, and help contribute to improved gender equality. They represent more long-term goals and are less visible than practical needs. Examples of strategic interests are: access to political and decision making positions; removal of legal obstacles such as discrimination in access to land and credit; training for women and men in non-traditional areas (carpentry for women, education for men); and men helping more equally with domestic work such as house cleaning, cooking and child care.



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# Gender Analysis - A Note on Statistics and Research

The information presented in this kit is reliant on the collection, collation, and quality of sex-disaggregated data. Sound policy and program planning may only be undertaken with the aid of gender and sex specific data. Viet Nam has recently taken important steps toward securing a system of more detailed gender sensitive data collection, and the results have provided much needed information. However significant gaps in research still exist, particularly with regard to individual (as opposed to household level) data, intra-household allocations and decision-making practices and hierarchies. While quantitative indicators such as access to education, health/health-care and employment rates are very important, such traditional indicators do not capture the depth and variety of ways in which gender differences and relational discrepancies manifest. Quantitative indicators are inadequate to examine and portray intra-household inequalities that relate to the distribution of power within households and gender relations (Government of Viet Nam-Donor-NGO Poverty Working Group 2000). As such, further qualitative and participatory research into gender relations needs to be pursued and presented to complement existing quantitative data.

## The Shift Toward Gender Statistics

The general approach in development strategy over the last 20 years has moved from women in development (WID) to gender and development (GAD). Thus, the focus has shifted from women in isolation to women in relation to men. Specifically, the gender approach considers the roles of men and women, how they differ, their interrelationships and the different impacts that policies and programs have on them. In statistics, the focus has therefore moved from statistics on women to gender statistics (FAO 2002).

For example, in the past, statistics offices and researchers have presented only aggregate labour force data for the entire population. However, globally, labour force participation for women (defined as the proportion of the total population of women aged 15-60 who are actually in the work force) is usually much lower than for men. Similarly, the distribution of the male and female labour force by sector is usually quite different. In many countries, a higher proportion of the female labour force is employed in the service sector, while a higher proportion of the male labour force is employed in industry, and particularly in heavy industries. There are also clear differences by occupation. Some “feminized” occupations such as teaching or nursing tend to be dominated by women while others, such as engineering, tend to be dominated by men (FAO 2002).

A consequence of the failure to recognize and routinely distinguish the different patterns for women and men is that the situation of men tends to be regarded as the norm or standard, and the different situation of women is overlooked. Furthermore, policies and programs may be based on stereotypes that are significantly different from the empirical reality. For example, agricultural programs continue to assume that “farmers are men” even in countries such as Thailand and Viet Nam where sex-disaggregated data show that a majority of farmers in many rural areas are actually women (UNIFEM 2002).

For these reasons, the early work on gender statistics focused primarily on ensuring that individual-level data are collected, tabulated, presented and analyzed by sex. While such sex disaggregation is important, it is not sufficient in itself, because traditional statistical systems have collected data on the issues that government officials and development analysts - most of whom were men - considered to be important. Issues that are important to women rather than men were overlooked. As a result, most developing countries do not collect data on issues such as domestic violence or on unpaid household and domestic work and child care (UNIFEM 2002).

Thus, later work on gender statistics has also encouraged statistical agencies to collect data on gender issues and has provided technical support for the collection of data on Violence Against Women and on Time Use, which shows how much time women and men spend on paid work, unpaid household work, child care, recreation, commuting, etc.

As noted above, failure to disaggregate statistics by sex meant that the differences between women and men were largely overlooked in the design and implementation of development policies, plans and programs. In particular, women's specific needs tended to be neglected. Thus, gender statistics were essential in order to assist policy makers and planners and development projects and programmes identify and meet women's needs equally with those of men (UNIFEM 2002).

### **The Special Need for Agricultural Statistics**

The production of more accurate estimates regarding the participation of men and women in the labour force, particularly in agriculture, not only generates sound statistics but also sound economics. Accurate information forms the basis of awareness about potential labour force misallocations and resulting welfare losses, such as loss of qualification or skill potential. In rural economies striving to maximise the use of available resources, skill loss would be a high price to pay, since skills and qualifications are directly involved in the development of new and more productive processes. Despite the mechanisation and intensification of agriculture, agricultural labour is likely to remain the principal factor affecting food security and economic change in many developing countries in the foreseeable future (FAO 2002).

Over the past 20 years, agricultural planners have often overlooked the "human factor", while social planners may have overlooked production or market factors, possibly because agricultural and social planners often belong to different ministries and their efforts are not easily coordinated. This indicates a limited use of information about social and human development in relation to the developmental priorities in agriculture. The lack of information on women's input in agrarian economies may be only one example of this misunderstanding of the role people play as human capital and agents of rural development in general. However, since the focus of this publication is the gender dimension, it concentrates mainly on issues related to the use of *gender-related* information for socio-economic development (FAO 2002)

### **Research and Statistics in the Viet Nam Context**

Collection of sex-disaggregated data and a subsequent gender analysis of the data will continue to be a prerequisite for sound gender-sensitive policy-making. Viet Nam has progressed well in data collection. In 2002 the General Statistics Office launched a new Household Living Standard Survey which will be carried out every two years. Preliminary data of this survey - available in 2003 - allows for a new gender analysis and timely adjustments for the implementation of the Government's Action Plans (eg, the Strategy for the Advancement of Women as well as the Plan of Action II) (FAO & UNDP 2002).

As part of the National Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women to 2005, the General Statistics Office is in the process of developing CEDAW indicators, to be applied routinely to data collection. The indicators which apply to the sectors of Population, Labour, Education, Health and Leadership are the first gender indicators developed in Viet Nam (NCFW 2002).

These data will also provide crucial information to measure progress made towards the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 as well as the Viet Nam Development Goals which form part of the Government's strategies, such as the Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (CPRGS) (FAO & UNDP 2002).

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# Overview of Gender and Development in Viet Nam

The total population of Viet Nam is 80 million, of which 49.2% are male and 50.8% are female (General Statistics Office). Viet Nam is a relatively poor country that has experienced dramatic changes in its transition from a centrally planned to a market oriented economy. Since launching key reforms through its *doi moi* or renovation strategy in 1986, the country has made remarkable progress across a broad range of socio-economic development measures. The rate of poverty fell from 58% of the population in 1993 to around 37% of the population in 1998 according to the international poverty line – one of the sharpest declines for any developing country on record. Much of the poverty reduction can be attributed to Viet Nam's strong agricultural performance since the late 1980s. Reform in the agricultural sector transformed Viet Nam from a country experiencing extreme food shortages to one of the world's largest exporters of rice, coffee and other agricultural commodities (UNCT 2002).

The reform process has also further improved social indicators that have been sustained over the period. In 2001, Viet Nam ranked 109 out of 173 countries in terms of the Human Development Index (HDI) – well above that which would be expected from its current level of GDP per capita of less than US\$400. Its Gender related Development Index (GDI) is ranked at 89 out of 146 countries (UNDP 2001b).

## National Policies Support Gender Equality

The Government of Viet Nam places human beings at the centre of development, promoting human potential and the well being of all. This is reflected in the success of the *doi moi* reforms and in the new Ten-Year Socio-Economic Development Strategy (2001-2010) approved by the Ninth Party Congress of the Communist Party of Viet Nam in April 2001. The main economic aspects of the Ten-Year Strategy are to accelerate socialist-oriented industrialisation and modernisation in order to establish the foundations for Viet Nam to gradually become an industrialised country by 2020. At the core of the government's strategy is the imperative to create a development process that is implemented by the people and for the people, and to ensure a decent minimum standard of living and equal opportunities for all (UNCT 2002). This approach is in line with the human development perspective, which defines development as the process of expanding people's capabilities and choices to improve their overall well-being. The Human Development approach advocates that all peoples regardless of race, class, religion, sex and nationality have equitable access to opportunities. It maintains that development without equity across these groups can lead to the disenfranchising of whole sectors of society and thus will fail (UNDP 2001).

There is a strong history of gender equity in Viet Nam, resulting in part from ancient matriarchal traditions. However, many of these traditions were eroded through centuries of Confucianism that spread during the years of Chinese occupation. With the advent of the Communist Party, socialist policy enshrined gender equity in the Constitution of Viet Nam and many policies of the Government. This has led to the current relatively high GDI in Viet Nam, compared to other countries in the region and countries with a similar GNP.

Viet Nam is a country in which gender roles are in transition. Gender stereotypes and gender values in Viet Nam have changed little from earlier decades or centuries, although what women do as part of their daily tasks has changed dramatically in recent years. Juggling these multiple, and sometimes contradictory expectations, has created new stresses for the younger generations of Vietnamese women. The present full-time productive workloads of women are conflicting with traditional roles and values causing anguish and confusion for many women trying to fulfil all expectations of themselves (Franklin, 1999).

## Gender Equality Means Changing Roles for Men and Women

Equality, of course, means changing gender roles for men as well as women, and women are recognizing this in the way they are approaching their relationships with the men in their lives. A study of gender conducted by the National Committee for the Advancement of Women (NCFAW) looked at men and women's perceptions of



### Regional Indexes of Human and Gender Development

	Human Development Index Rank among 173 nations	Gender Development Index Rank among 146 nations
<b>Viet Nam</b>	109	89
Cambodia	130	109
Lao PDR	143	119
Myanmar	127	107
Thailand	70	58

Source: UNDP, 2002.

the ideal man. While men perceived the ideal man as a person earning a lot of money for his family, women – particularly young women, considered the ideal man as a good father and husband who loves, understands and supports his wife actively (Franklin 1999).

As in many countries of the region, the majority of men and women in Viet Nam live in rural areas. The paid positions that women hold are predominantly in hotels, restaurants, tourism, banking, schools, hospitals and health care centres, and in textile and garment manufacturing, where they run 80% of the businesses (Desai, 1995). Men dominate in the areas of forestry, chemistry, science and technology, sport, culture, heavy industry, energy, irrigation and construction (as illustrated in the graphs following).

The socio-political structure of Viet Nam has shaped many of the current trends in the country. Viet Nam has a very stable government that contributes to socio-political stability and strong mass organizations such as the Women’s Union, which has eleven million members (NCFAW 2000). Within this stable political environment, national and international institutions are able to now pay attention increasingly to the challenges of inclusion – how to make a pattern of growth and development that benefits all members of society, not just the lucky few (Government of Viet Nam-Donor-NGO Poverty Working Group 2000).

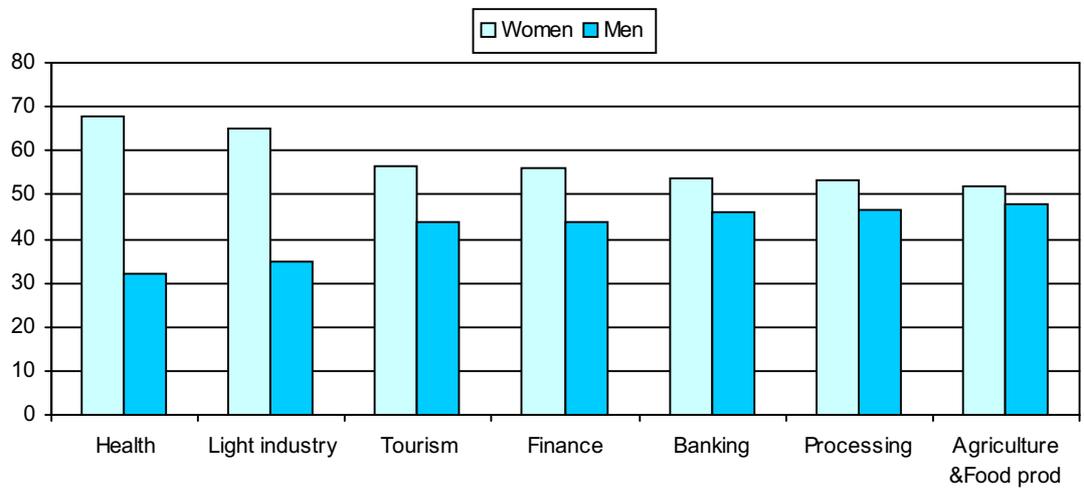
Viet Nam performs well on many indicators of gender equality. For example, childhood health indicators do not show discrimination against female infants, and basic primary education rates are almost equal between boys and girls from the dominant ethnic group, the Kinh. However there is evidence that economic development and the renovation process has impacted differently on men and women and perhaps most negatively on people of ethnic minority, for whom the gap between the socio economic development of their communities and that of the majority population is in fact widening (Poverty Task Force 2002).

Although Viet Nam’s Gender-related Development Index is higher, relative to its Human Development Index and its GNP, gender based discrepancies still prevail in all sectors. For example women still fare worse than men in higher education and health statistics, and traditional stereotypes dominate the distribution of the labour market, leading to gendered occupation strata and therefore, different and discriminatory average real wages for men and women.

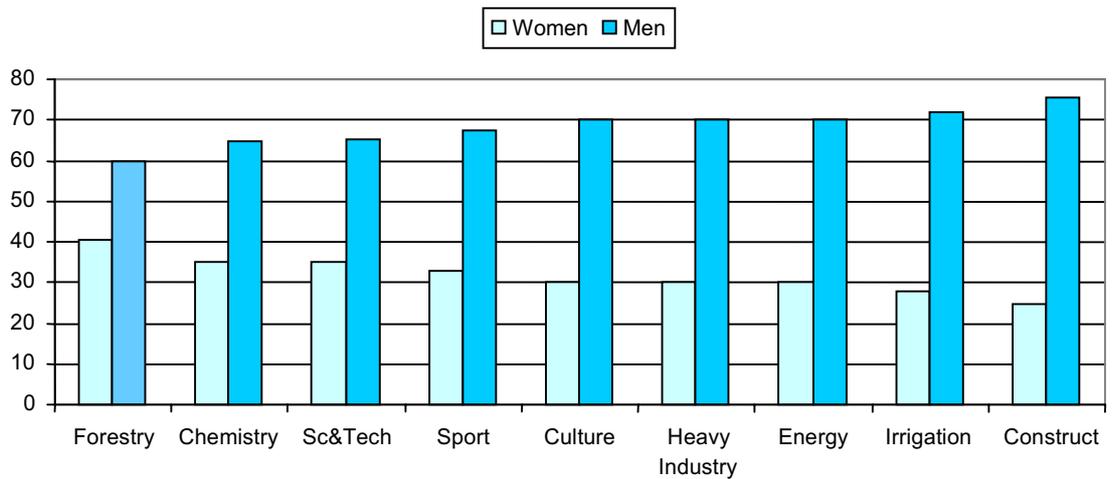
Qualitative research conducted by the World Bank Development/Research Group has provided insight into the different gendered experiences of the recent and current economic transition. For example, men are very concerned about the preservation of the status quo in terms of moral and civic values. Women express interest in access to new forms of knowledge and communication, despite professing fears for its impact on youth.

### Employment Participation Rates

#### Sectors where Women Dominate



#### Sector where Men Dominate



Source: GSO, 2000b

Men articulate their concerns in national terms while women tend to speak more about community and household concerns (Long et al 2000). How Viet Nam seeks to address such different, gendered concerns within its population will form a crucial part of its response to the challenge of sustainable development.

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# Gender Relations in the Past

The earliest legends of Vietnamese society describe Viet Nam as a matriarchy in which Lady Sao Cai introduced the practice of rice cultivation. Many legends praise the efforts of Viet Nam's historical female figures, such as the stories of heroism of the Trung sisters (Trung Trac and Trung Nhi) and Lady Trieu (Ba Trieu). In 43 AD, the Trung sisters, accompanied by female generals and lieutenants, led an army of 80,000 to overcome the Chinese occupation forces in Viet Nam. Two centuries later, in 248 AD, Ba Trieu, a nineteen year-old peasant led a rebellion, again ousting the Chinese. Throughout the centuries these women have remained a strong part of Vietnamese folklore.

However, the one thousand years of Chinese occupation of the north of Viet Nam left a strong imprint on the social and cultural development of the country. Confucianism, which was brought to Viet Nam by the Chinese and then later adopted as the official ideology of the Vietnamese feudal state, had a very strong effect on gender relationships. According to Confucian doctrines, men are superior, and women are inferior. Women are subjects to be ruled by their father, husband, eldest son and king. This male domination was also reflected in the gender roles and division of labour in society.

Confucian influence, however, diminished in the south of Viet Nam, due to the domination of other South-East Asian cultures. Central Viet Nam, dominated by Cham culture (from the Kingdom of Champa, an outpost of Hindu civilisation), developed a matrilocal<sup>1</sup> and matrilineal<sup>2</sup> society. In this region, women were considered goddesses, with power over food production. Temples were dedicated to 'Lady Soya', 'Lady Mulberry' and 'Lady Bean'. Some ethnic minority groups, such as the Khua and Khang, still choose a woman to be the 'mother of rice', to pick the first part of the crop at harvest time, to appease the God of the rice and ward off bad weather (Mai and Le, 1978:14). Nevertheless, strong Confucian influence still exists among the communities of Chinese origin and highly educated groups in the south of Viet Nam.

It is notable that, although Confucianism limits its activities within the household, Vietnamese women historically enjoyed greater freedom as compared to Chinese women. For example, they actively participated in economic and social activities outside of the family, mainly due to the fact that men were usually absent from many families due to frequent war during the history of Viet Nam. The Viet Nam Women's Union and Centre for Women's Studies, in outlining the history of women, consider that Vietnamese women held a "special position and prestige in family and society", compared with women in surrounding countries (VWU & CFWS, 1989:8).

The earliest document relating to equality between men and women is from the Le Dynasty, the Hong Duc Code dated 1483, which provided women with equal inheritance rights, the right to divorce and protection from violence.

## French Colonialism

A feudal system embedded with Confucianism prevailed until French colonialism in the early twentieth century. Vietnamese records of French colonialism illustrate a harsh period of history for men and women during this time. Under feudalism, girls were refused access to school. Under the colonial rule, brutal labour, plunder, poverty and diseases reduced most women to illiteracy and ignorance (Le Thi, 1987:18).

<sup>1</sup> Matrilocal residence: societal rules that the newly married couple live with the parents of the bride (Richard J.Gelles. 1995. *Contemporary families: A sociological view*. Sage Publication).

<sup>2</sup> Matrilineal descent: A family system that traces lineage and inheritance through the mother's line or family (Richard J.Gelles. 1995. *ibid.*)



In the book *Indictment of French Colonialism*, published in France in 1925, Ho Chi Minh dedicated a chapter to the problem of “the sufferings and humiliations suffered by the native women”. He wrote:

Nowhere does the woman escape the violence and cruelties of the invaders; in the street, in the house, at the marketplace, in the countryside. Everywhere she endures harsh treatment of administrators, officers, police, customs (Ho Chi Minh, VWU, 1969:22).

French colonial rule also contributed to an increased discussion on women’s liberation and women’s issues. With the approval of French bureaucrats, Pham Quynh developed a curriculum for women that included Vietnamese literature, history and natural sciences, and a curriculum of sewing, math, and French for girls. This was not without opposition in the society, as writer Nguyen Ba Hoc argued, “the higher that women are able to study, the more income they will squander, the more their sexual desires will be inflamed, the more destitute they will end up” (Marr, 1981: 202-3).

Over one million women in Viet Nam were active in the resistance against the French. In 1945, the first all-female guerrilla unit was formed and led by Ha Thi Que, who later became the head of the Viet Nam Women’s Union and a member of the Central Committee of the Viet Nam Communist Party.

The strong socialist politics after French independence, led to the enshrinement of gender equality in the first Constitution of Viet Nam in 1946, which states that:

All power in the country belongs to the Vietnamese people, irrespective of race, sex, fortune, class, religion...and that women are equal to men in all respects (Government of Viet Nam, 1946, Article 9).

The Constitutions of 1959, 1980 and 1992 further refine and highlight the rights of women in the context of economic and political equality.

### **Socialist Policy**

In 1930, the Vietnamese Communist Party was established under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh, who established in this same year, the Women’s Emancipation Association (later re-named the Viet Nam Women’s Union), making it the world’s longest running national machinery for women.

Ho Chi Minh identified gender equality as one of the ten main tasks of the Vietnamese Revolution. He stated:

What equality really means is a thorough-going and difficult revolution because contempt for women dates back thousands of years...If this large scale revolution is to be successful, progress will have to be made in every field: political, economic, cultural and legal (Quoted in Mai and Le, 1981:172).

Before liberation in 1945, women were considered in Viet Nam to be imprisoned by the three ‘cangues’, or neckchains, which were identified as Confucianism, colonialism and patriarchy (VWU & CFWS, 1989). The Communist Party gave strong support to women’s advancement in a rhetorical sense. This may not have always passed into practice, but it certainly created an institutional context for a type of feminism that supported many women’s rights. This includes labour laws, extensive access to maternity benefits and child-care centres, access to education and employment, and legalized abortion.

The Party and the Government, despite the many difficulties they are encountering, try their best to improve the livelihoods of labouring women and their children, so as to alleviate the familial burden and ensure women’s health. In 1983, paid maternity leave in Viet Nam was extended from 60 days to 75 days. In December 1984, according to Resolution No. 176a, paid maternity leave was extended to 180 days. More creches and kindergartens have been set up by the State, factories and cooperatives. In many city wards, special groups of

babysitters have been set up by the women's union for children who for one reason or another cannot go to the creches or kindergartens (VWU, 1985:2).

Although this differs from other countries where women fought (and are still fighting) for these rights, women in Viet Nam were given them as a part of government policy, rather than gaining them from a strategy of mobilization through a 'women's movement' as such. This is not to say that there was not an organized women's 'movement' in Viet Nam — but it was government inspired and supported. This influence of the State brought legislation, government support and funding to women's concerns. Now under the market oriented 'renovation' (*doi moi*) period, women are losing some of these rights, particularly paid maternity leave, that is seen as too expensive for private enterprises to bear.

#### **At War with America**

During the war, from 1964 to 1975, women had to assume responsibilities in the government which had previously been held by men. From 1965 to 1967, the increase in proportion of women members of the district people's councils increased from 25.5% to 45.8%; in village people's councils from 19.3% to 47.4%; in district administrative committees from 11.2% to 26.48%; and the number of women members of village administrative committees from 11.2% to 32.7% (VWU, 1968:24). During this period, there was also an increase in the number of children in creches (from 276,122 to 378,078).

#### **International Solidarity**

During the French and American wars of resistance, women from many countries of the world sent letters and telegrams of support to the women of Viet Nam.

...could we forget that during the Geneva Conference on ending the Viet Nam War, hundreds of women's delegations from France came to Geneva to bring presents to bear in support of the Vietnamese cause (VWU, 1971: 28).

In this sense, the French and then the American War in Viet Nam, helped to ensure that the Women's Union had very strong international links with women's groups from other countries of the world. The President of the Women's Union in 1971, Nguyen Thi Thap, stated that:

...the revolutionary gains of the Vietnamese fatherland, of the Vietnamese people, and of the liberation of Vietnamese women over the past 25 years are indissolubly linked to the warm moral and material support extended by the peoples and women of the fraternal socialist countries, and the peace loving peoples and women around the world. We sincerely thank our sisters from all over the earth for their lofty support in our protracted and arduous resistance wars...we are proud to now have millions of friends in hundreds of women's organisations in the world who approve of our just resistance (Nguyen Thi Thap, in VWU, 1971:31).

#### **Doi Moi and Gender Relations**

Beginning with the Sixth National Party Congress in 1986, Viet Nam introduced renovation, or *doi moi*, policies that were extended by the 1992 constitution. These reforms allowed price floats, engaged private sectors into business, de-collectivised farmlands and liberalised foreign trade and investment. A series of economic, social and legal reforms followed the marketisation of the economy.

As Vietnamese society modernises, it is expected that differences in gender roles will narrow. Communist ideology as well as the Law on Marriage and the Family have attempted to promote gender equality within Vietnamese society. In particular, during the recent years of economic reform, women have made up a vital

part of the labour force, from agriculture to the business sector, yet support for full gender equality is still lacking. Strong family traditions, often centered on patriarchal understandings still prevail, despite being increasingly at odds with the economic reality of contemporary gender roles and relations.

For example, most Vietnamese people both men and women – still ascribe to a traditional role for women, believing that a man has more right to a job than a woman, and that housework for a wife is just as fulfilling as paid employment. The majority of Vietnamese people also say that men make better politicians. Although there is some evidence that modernisation will attenuate these perceptions, it remains to be seen how pervasively the concept of gender equality will develop within a society that accepts Confucian traditions, the centrality of the family, and the associated patterns of authority relations (Dalton et al 2002).

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# National Machinery for Promoting Gender Equality

The national machinery aimed at developing and promoting gender equality in Viet Nam includes the National Committee for the Advancement of Women (NCFAW), Ministerial and Provincial Committees for the Advancement of Women (CFAWs), and the mass organization of the Viet Nam Women's Union (VWU).

## **National Committee for the Advancement of Women (NCFAW)**

Address	39 Hang Chuoi St, Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 821 0068 or 971 1349
Fax	(84 4) 821 0068 or 971 1348
e-mail	ncfaw@hn.vnn.vn

The National Committee for the Advancement of Women in Viet Nam provides advice to the Prime Minister's office on the formulation and implementation of Viet Nam's primary gender equality strategies. The Committee was formed in 1993 when the Prime Minister acted to strengthen the National Committee for the Women's Decade, and transform it into the National Committee for the Advancement of Women.

In 1985, the National Committee for the Women's Decade was formed in Viet Nam as a response to the International Decade for Women and the Nairobi Women's Conference. In 1993, the Committee changed its membership and main duties, as well as its name, to become NCFAW. NCFAW was the official Government body representing Viet Nam at the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference for Women in Beijing and continues to represent Viet Nam in its participation in international fora.

The Committee is made up of 17 members including representatives from ministries and organizations such as the Ho Chi Minh Youth Union and the Viet Nam Farmer's Union. The Chairperson of NCFAW, Madame Ha Thi Khiet is a member of the Party Committee and the National Assembly, and is also president of the Vietnamese Women's Union. The two vice-presidents are the Vice-Ministers of the Ministry of Education and Training, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. NCFAW meets once every six months. The day to day work of NCFAW is carried out by a Standing Committee of ten people.

Each ministry and province also has a Ministerial Committee for the Advancement of Women (CFAW) and a Provincial CFAW. These committees have developed their own ministerial and provincial Plans of Action (POA), which are monitored through the National Committee for the Advancement of Women.

The main activities of NCFAW include:

- Providing advice to the Government regarding the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women and the National Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women
- Disseminating information on the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW);
- Developing global and national development strategies for the advancement of women;
- Supporting the Government's efforts to issue guidelines on implementing the POA on Women;
- Advising on policies related to women and monitoring their implementation;
- Strengthening the machinery for the advancement of women at all levels;
- Developing and maintaining international relations network.



### **The Viet Nam Women's Union (VWU)**

Address            39 Hang Chuoi St, Ha Noi  
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 e-mail             vwunion@netnam.org.vn

The VWU is one of the most active mass organizations in the country. When formed in 1930, its main function was to mobilize women for wartime activities. More recently, its identity and role have expanded more to social welfare and development projects under the Government's renovation program - *doi moi*. The VWU is still closely linked to the Government.

The VWU has a highly tiered decision-making structure, which makes it particularly effective for networking with women at all levels throughout Viet Nam. It operates at four administrative levels: central, provincial, district and commune. A National Women's Congress meets once every five years, with delegates elected on the basis of proportional representation.

A fifteen-member Presidium oversees the day to day operations of the central level VWU. In 1999, the Women's Union throughout Viet Nam had a staff of 4,000 full-time cadre including over 300 staff in ten departments in the Ha Noi national office, as well as 12,000 grassroots organizations (women's unions at a commune level) to implement Government policy on women.

The VWU has an estimated membership of more than eleven million women representing more than 50% of the female population over the age of 18. Members are predominantly rural women between the ages of 30 and 50. Membership is voluntary, with a symbolic membership fee of 2,000 dong per annum, which is often waived for poor women.

In 1988, the status of the VWU was enhanced by a decree stating that all levels of Government are to consult with the VWU on all matters concerning women and children. The two main activities of the VWU at the local level are income generation credit schemes, and mother and child health and family planning programs. They have successfully set up 12,000 savings groups with a total membership of 400,000 women and they have worked with the Agricultural Bank and international donors to provide credit to women for income generating activities.

### **Plan of Action 2002-2007**

The Plan of Action for the VWU for the period 2002-2007 provides for the main measures to support women in performing their multiple tasks. These measures, as stated, include:

- Increasing women's levels of education and training
- Enhance their economic power and rights through the extension of micro-credit, business consultancy services for micro-enterprises and vocational training for self-employment generation
- Extending reproductive health and family planning services
- Eradicating social evils with a household perspective
- Strengthening the capacity of the VWU to better serve women's interests at all levels of operation
- Intensive policy dialogue and advocacy work in the framework of law making and execution
- Promoting women's presence in government cadres and leadership

# National Strategies for Gender Equality

## **The National Strategy for the Advancement of Women in Viet Nam by 2010**

The National Strategy for the Advancement of Women in Viet Nam by 2010 plays a crucial role in the Government's overall framework to achieve and sustain gender equality. It follows on from the first National Strategy for the Advancement of Women by 2000, and promotes the advancement of women across sectors. The overall objective of the Strategy is to:

Improve the quality of women's material and spiritual life, as well as establishing the conditions necessary for women to experience their fundamental rights, and to fully and equally participate in and benefit from all aspects of political, economic, cultural and social life (*NCFAW 2002*).

The strategy reflects the government's on-going commitment to sustainable and equitable development across all fields. It involves the coordination and support of key line ministries, representing a comprehensive cross-cutting approach to the goal of gender equality.

The National Strategy for the Advancement of Women includes five key objectives with discrete targets in each field to be reached by 2010, all contributing to the greater goal of sustainable gender equality.

The key areas of focus for the strategy to 2010 are:

- Labour and employment
- Education
- Health care
- Leadership at all levels and in all sectors
- Capacity of the machinery for the advancement of women

## **Gender Equality - A Goal for All Sectors**

In order to achieve the objectives of the Strategy, the Government has clearly mandated the coordinated efforts of key line ministries. The National Strategy for the Advancement of Women reflects an on-going commitment to the understanding of gender equality as a cross-cutting, inter-sectoral issue. The strategy outlines the roles and responsibilities of ministries, as follows:

*The Ministry of Planning and Investment to:*

Integrate gender equality into five-year and annual socio-economic development plans of the country; to guide, monitor, evaluate and report the implementation of the objectives and tasks of the Strategy to the Prime Minister on an annual basis; to organize the mid-term review of the implementation in 2005 and the final review in 2010.

*The Ministries of Health, Education and Training, Agriculture and Rural Development, Labour - War Invalids and Social Affairs, Justice, the Government Committee on Organization and Personnel and other relevant agencies to:*

Develop five-year and annual action plans aimed at achieving the objectives of the Strategy for submission to the Ministry of Planning and Investment and organize the implementation of these plans; to incorporate gender equality into long-term and short-term plans of respective ministries and branches; to integrate activities under this Strategy into those under relevant national target programs, strategies and other programs with investment given, on a priority basis, to girls and women of ethnic minority groups and poor families as well as to those infected with HIV/AIDS; to prepare and submit annual reports to the Minister of Planning and Investment and the Chairperson of the National Committee for the Advancement of Women in Viet Nam.

*The Ministry of Finance to:*

Collaborate with the Ministry of Planning and Investment, the National Committee for the Advancement of Women in Viet Nam, other relevant ministries and branches and People's Committees of provinces



and centrally managed cities in preparing annual budgets for the implementation of the objectives and tasks of the Strategy; to guide other relevant ministries, branches and localities in how to use the financial resources for the implementation of the Strategy.

*The Ministry of Foreign Affairs to:*

Collaborate with other relevant ministries and branches in mobilizing resources from foreign governmental and non-governmental organizations as well as from United Nations organizations for the implementation of the Strategy.

*The General Statistical Office to:*

Collaborate with relevant ministries and branches in making annual and five-year assessments and analysis of the implementation of the objectives of the Strategy for submission to the Ministry of Planning and Investment and the National Committee for the Advancement of Women in Viet Nam.

*The National Committee for the Advancement of Women in Viet Nam to:*

Serve as a focal point in the field of international cooperation related to gender equality and the advancement of women; to collaborate with relevant agencies in developing and submitting to the Prime Minister proposals on law and policy making related to gender equality; to monitor, supervise and inspect the implementation of laws and policies on women; to disseminate and promote the implementation of laws and policies on women and CEDAW.

*People's Committees of provinces and centrally managed cities to:*

Incorporate gender equality into their own socio-economic development plans; to develop and organize the implementation of five-year and annual action plans aimed at achieving the objectives of the Strategy; to integrate activities under this Strategy into those under other relevant national target programmes and strategies as well as under other relevant socio-economic development programs and plans of the same province/city; to prepare and submit annual reports to the Minister of Planning and Investment and the Chairperson of NCFAW in Viet Nam.

*The Viet Nam Fatherland Front, the Viet Nam Women's Union, other member organizations of the Front to:*

Implement the Strategy within their respective scopes of operations.

### **Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women in Viet Nam by 2005**

The *Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women in Viet Nam by 2005* (POA 2) was developed by NCFAW to guide the implementation of the first five years of the National Strategy to 2010. The Plan was informed by recommendations from the grassroots level and is based on the objectives of the National Strategy.

The targets and actions for implementation detailed in the POA 2 are based directly on the objectives specified in the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women. The overall purpose of the plan is to:

Stabilise and improve the quality of women's material and spiritual life; Establish conditions necessary for women to experience their fundamental rights, and to fully and equally participate in and benefit from all aspects of political, economic, cultural and social life (NCFAW 2002b).

The POA 2 is informed by the understanding that sustainable gender equality is a cross-cutting issue. It details the specific responsibilities of ministries and agencies in implementing the plan to achieve the broader goal of gender equality, as follows:

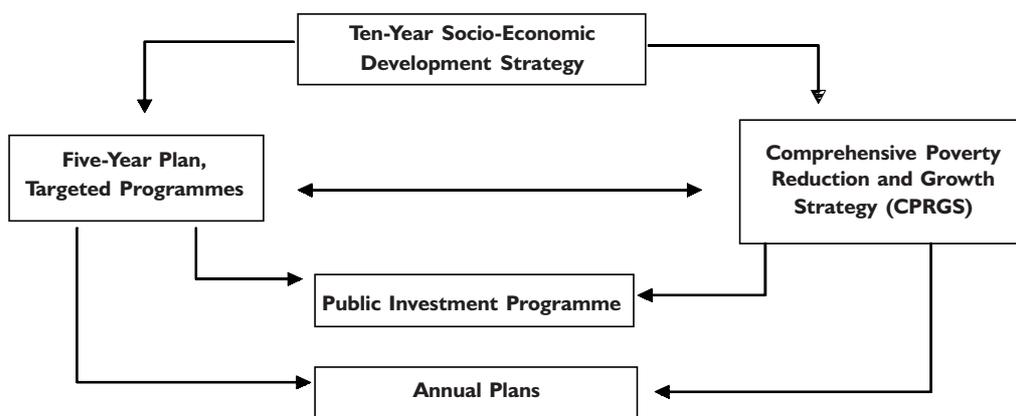
The Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), in collaboration with NCFAW and related ministries, branches and other bodies, and the People's Committees of provinces and centrally managed cities, will coordinate the implementation of the POA 2. Gender will be integrated into the five year and annual socio-economic

development plans of ministries, branches and localities. The agencies listed in the POA 2 will develop their own plans, and are responsible for planning and implementing assigned activities that are relevant to their organizations's professional activities in fulfilling the POA 2 targets.

### **Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (CPRGS)**

The Government of Viet Nam has a strong commitment to poverty reduction and social equity. This commitment to eradicate poverty is articulated in the CPRGS, which was approved by the Prime Minister in May 2002.

The CPRGS is a strategy that attempts to translate the Government's Ten-Year Socio-economic Development Strategy, Five-Year Development Plan as well as other sectoral development plans into concrete measures with well-defined road maps for realizing economic growth and poverty reduction objectives. The CPRGS plays an important role in drawing together the components of all other sectoral strategies by giving them a poverty focus, addressing cross-sectoral issues, and identifying priorities. The links between the Government's Ten-Year Strategy, and Five-Year development plans and the CPRGS are shown below:



The CPRGS recognises the links between gender inequality and poverty for all of society. It advocates harmony between economic growth and measures to solve social problems. The strategy aims to:

promote rapid and sustainable economic growth coupled with attainment of social progress and equity with an aim to improving the material conditions and quality of life of all population strata; maintain rapid development of the dynamic areas and create favorable conditions for them to achieve high economic growth rates (CPRGS 2002).

The goal of gender equality is identified as essential to the overall strategy. However, emphasis in the CPRGS is given to the traditional areas of gender analysis such as the advancement of women, education and some women's health priorities.

### **Millennium Development Goals and Viet Nam Development Goals**

In September 2000, at the United Nations Millennium Summit, 189 countries adopted the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs are a set of eight goals with corresponding targets and indicators which provide a basis for monitoring human development. They are comprised of eight major goals:

- Eradicate poverty and hunger
- Achieve universal primary education
- Promote gender equality and empower women
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Ensure environmental sustainability
- Develop a global partnership for development

Numerical targets have been set for each of the goals, which are to be achieved over a 25 year period from 1990-2015 (UNCT 2002).

The Government of Viet Nam intended for the CPRGS to reflect these international targets and commitments. Rather than adopting them in their original form, the MDGs were adapted to the Vietnamese context and localized into Viet Nam Development Goals (VDGs). For example in some areas, such as poverty reduction, Viet Nam has already reached its goal to halve the rate of poverty by 2015 and thus a more ambitious goal was set.

The **Viet Nam Development Goals** (VDGs) were formulated therefore to better reflect the precise development situation in Viet Nam. The VDGs are based on the MDGs listed above and, among others, make particular reference to the goals of Universalising Education and Ensuring Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment.

This goal incorporates the targets of:

- Increasing the number of women in elective bodies at all levels
- Increasing the participation of women in agencies and sectors (including ministries, central agencies and enterprises) at all levels by 3-5% in the next 10 years
- Ensure that the names of both husband and wife appear on land-use certificates by 2005
- Reduce the vulnerability of women to domestic violence

The VDGs are incorporated into the CPRGS, thus placing Viet Nam further along the path of reaching the global Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This constitutes an important step for Viet Nam to remain in the forefront of reaching the MDGs (Poverty Task Force 2002).

### **Making the Transition to Mainstreaming Gender Equality**

Although Viet Nam's official policies, laws and institutional structures are meant to support of gender equality, obstacles to the promotion of gender equality in the sphere of policy development and implementation remain. The focus of efforts in Viet Nam, originally the responsibility of the VWU, have been predominately women-focused, have generally not addressed the structural or strategic issues underlying gender disparities, and have tended to be limited to a few issues and sectors that are believed to be relevant to women's needs such as health, education, and equal access to employment. Important areas for attention in strengthening efforts towards mainstreaming gender equality include:

**Conceptual Clarity:** The conceptual shifts in the discourse on women in development (WID), and gender and development (GAD), have created some confusion. There is currently a critical mass of leaders and government officials who are unclear about the difference between a WID approach and a GAD approach to achieving gender equality. It is important that major concepts such as 'gender', 'gender equality', 'mainstreaming women' and 'mainstreaming gender equality' are clearly understood in the very least by all those responsible for leading and implementing the gender mainstreaming process.



**Content and Approach of Action Plans:** Action plans of the NCFAW (2001-2005) and the VWU (2002-2007), aimed to help address existing gender gaps, are also at risk of exacerbating the tendency of increasing multiple tasks required of women, crystallized in new conflicting role models as perfect mothers and wives in the domestic sphere, and efficient labourers outside of it. It is important to take note of the observations of gender specialists of various development agencies who have often remarked that some national organizations have tended in the past to replicate gender stereotypes and roles. It is important to carefully evaluate plans of action that aim to enhance the agency of women as economic actors outside the domestic walls as well as their obedience to traditional roles and values of primary caretakers in the family, without, for instance, mentioning issues of workload sharing and power equality within households.

**Titles of Action Plans to Reflect Gender Equality:** Importantly, consideration needs to be given to renaming Action Plans so that they accurately reflect the Gender and Development approach to achieving gender equality. While Action Plans continue to use only the words 'Advancement of Women' in their titles, they run the risk of reinforcing the mistaken belief that gender equality efforts involve and benefit only women and girls. This title also indirectly discriminates against boys and men's gender equality issues by excluding them in the title and in the objectives of the plans. The fact that gender equality involves and benefits all members of society should be reflected in the titles of future action plans.

**Leadership for Mainstreaming Gender Equality:** There is still a critical mass of leaders and policy makers who are unaware of the important links between gender equality, poverty reduction and economic growth. They also remain unaware of the importance of mainstreaming gender equality as the most effective approach to achieving gender equality. Most leaders and policy makers continue to regard 'women's issues' as the responsibility of the NCFAW and the VWU.

Redressing inequality is a shared responsibility by all government stakeholders – and is not just the job of the women's union or the national machinery for the advancement of women. International experience shows that mainstreaming gender equality cannot be successful unless a number of critical enabling factors are present.

A key success factor for mainstreaming gender is the support of high-level leaders. High-levels leaders must be committed to and actively and publicly support the process of mainstreaming gender equality. Senior managers must provide clear messages about the priority assigned to gender equality and gender mainstreaming, and make demands on staff for information, analysis and update on progress. When such demands are not made, and when staff is not held accountable for action on issues of equality, there is little incentive for action. Without strong high-level leadership support the goal of gender equality and the success of mainstreaming gender equality as a strategy are unlikely to be achieved.

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# Gender Issues in Education

Education is considered as Viet Nam's most important and "foremost National Policy" (MOET 2001). In 2001, the Prime Minister approved the national "Education Development Strategic Plan" for 2001-2010. The strategy comprises of two five-year education plans, incorporated into the country's socio-economic development strategy to 2010.

The strategy focuses on the transformation of Viet Nam's education system into a system comparable to those of developed nations. The equitable provision of quality basic education for all, together with the elimination of gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 are also Viet Nam Development Goals, reflecting the Government's commitment to the understanding of education as at "the heart of development" (Poverty Working Group 2002).

Vietnamese people have always placed great value on education. The first formal public education system was established in the tenth century during the Ly Dynasty. The first national university of Viet Nam, Quoc Tu Giam, was founded in 1070. Initially, only children from royal and mandarin families were accepted for classes. Later, outstanding students from the mass population were also allowed to study there. By the fifteenth century, the public education system was expanded to the provincial level. Most villages also had private classes ruled by retired mandarins or local intellectuals.

However, women, regardless of the wealth of their families, were never accepted for studying in these schools. Even princesses and mandarins' daughters could not attend the public schools, but studied in special classes where they learned Confucian doctrines for women, and domestic skills. Many rich families also invited teachers to tutor their daughters at home.

In traditional society, achieving a high education was the only way for social promotion. However, the right to study was reserved for men only. Until 1945, except for a few women teachers serving the royal family, there were no women working in the government system. Nevertheless, many Vietnamese women have been well known for their intelligence and talent. The beautiful poems by Ngo Chi Lan (sixteenth century), Doan Thi Diem, Ho Xuan Huong and Ba Huyen Thanh Quan (eighteenth century) provided significant contributions to the Vietnamese heritage of literature and art.

In 1920, the French education system replaced the Chinese model of education in Viet Nam. In theory, schools were now to accept women, but in fact, only a few women in urban areas had the opportunity to receive formal education. Among the total of 1,000 university students in the whole of Viet Nam in 1945, there were only a few women.

Immediately following independence, the government commenced major efforts to expand the public education system. Under the literacy campaign launched by Ho Chi Minh in 1945, women were encouraged to join literacy classes and to enter higher levels of education (Tran Thi Van Anh, 2000). For the first time, equal access to education and training between women and men was declared and confirmed by the Constitution promulgated in 1946.

With a strong commitment to equality of opportunities in education and other social services, Viet Nam has made great achievements in providing education for women and men. Despite its low GDP, Viet Nam has attained exceptionally high levels of literacy for both women and men as compared to other developing countries. However amongst people of different ethnic minorities, there are higher levels of illiteracy and greater gender disparities in school enrolments (see section on ethnic minorities).

In the first few years since the adoption of the *doi moi* reforms, the rate of enrolment decreased and the rate of dropouts from school increased due to the removal of education subsidies. Due to the efforts of the

Literacy Rate (% of Population)		
Country	Women	Men
Viet Nam	91.4	95.5
Lao PDR	33.2	64.1
Myanmar	80.5	89.0
Thailand	93.9	97.1
Bangladesh	29.9	52.3
Philippines	95.1	95.5

Source: UNDP, 2002 (The literacy rate for population aged 15 and older).

Female Education Attainment in Viet Nam	
Education Certificate	Women as Proportion of Total (%)
Professor	4
Associate professor	7.8
Doctor	19.6
University and colleges	37.5
Professional colleges	55.7
Technical workers	20.8

Source: Ministry of Education and Training, 2000a.

Government and donors, this trend did not continue for long. Higher enrolment rates were achieved by 1995, with further developments in this regard documented for 1999.

According to the results of the General Statistical Office's 1997-1998 Viet Nam Living Standards Survey (VLSS), the rate of participation in education for men and women illustrates relatively low sex disparities in access and attainment in education (see graph on page 34), particularly in the lower levels.

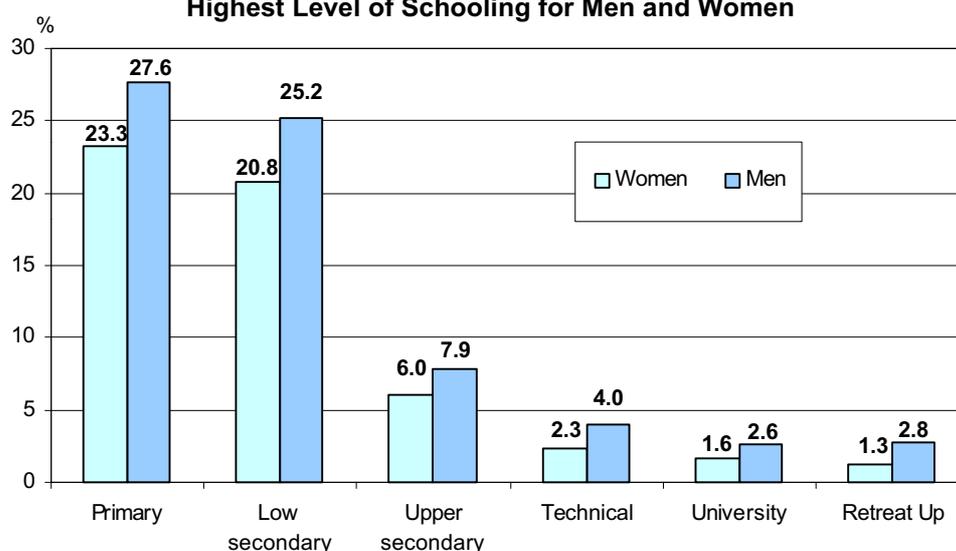
### Gender Gaps and Issues in Education

It was reported that in 1999, of 5.3 million illiterate people all over the country, around 69% were female (GSO, 2000b). Although the rate of female literacy has improved in the last decades, there remains a gap of around twelve per cent between the two sexes for people over forty years of age.

There has been impressive progress in expanding access to general education for both girls and boys during the last five years. However, the enrolment rate for girls is still recorded as lower than that for boys for primary education as well as for higher levels of education (see next page).

Girls drop out of the education system more frequently than boys do. Among those aged 12-18 in 1998, 72.5% of boys and 66.6% of girls were in school. The gender gap grows wider with age with a greater gap at the upper

**Levels of Attainment in Education:  
Highest Level of Schooling for Men and Women**



Source: GSO, 2000 b

Net school enrolment rate by education level and sex 1993-1998 (percentage)				
Level	1993		1998	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Primary	87.1	86.3	90.7	92.1
Lower-secondary	29.0	31.2	62.1	61.3
Higher-secondary	6.1	8.4	27.4	30.0

Source: Nguyen Nguyet Nga, 2000

secondary level than the lower secondary level. One explanation for the gap is that families simply discriminate in favour of their sons. It may be perceived that a male child has better job prospects than an equally educated daughter, so the educational investment is made for the son (Haughton et al 2001).

The 1999 Census reports that 12% of girls aged five and over have never attended school, while the rate is 7.5% for boys (GSO, 2000a). Also, a large percentage of both boys and girls are behind their target grade at school, that is the grade in which they should be for their age. More girls are on target (60%) than boys (54%), yet boys are still more likely to progress beyond lower secondary school (FAO & UNDP 2002).

Amongst the poorest families girls have less access to school than boys do. In 1998, the gap in access to primary schools between girls and boys was larger for the poorest twenty per cent of families, than for the population overall. The gender gap actually widened for children of parents with no education, over the period from 1993 to 1998 (FAO & UNDP 2002). In basic education, despite significant improvement of the school curriculum, there remain many problems, including the use of school textbooks that portray gender stereotypes.



Due to strong gender stereotypes in the fields of studies chosen and a traditional gender division of labour, female students are concentrated mainly in social disciplines, such as education and social sciences, accounting for about 70% of all students in these fields. Men dominate in technical disciplines, such as engineering and agronomy, accounting for over 70% of all students in these fields (MOET, 2000b). The same phenomenon can also be seen in the types of trades that women and men study in short vocational courses at vocational training centres. This may limit women's access to a wider range of education and training that lead to greater employment and income opportunities in the labour market.

There has been considerable progress in improving women's access to vocational and higher education over the last five years. Women's participation in secondary technical schools has been almost equal to that of men and even increased slightly during 1995-99. Although the number of women with higher education (university and college) qualifications is low, at around 2% of the population, the share of women among the total number of higher education students in the same period has increased from 40% to 42% (MOET, 2000b).

Major challenges in education and human resource development do exist. Although national primary school enrolment rates are around 90%, they are significantly lower in mountainous, central and Mekong Delta areas. In these areas, *gender disparities in enrolment rates are greater, especially for ethnic minorities* (see section on ethnic minorities for more information on education for ethnic minority children). Although a great deal of effort has been made to provide training for the rural population, their level of professional and technical qualification remains low. Women are over-represented in the agricultural sector, in which they play an important role, yet they also have low and inadequate access to agricultural extension (see section on agriculture and land use).

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# Gender Issues in Labour and Economic Activity

## Emerging Gender Issues in the Transition to a Market Economy

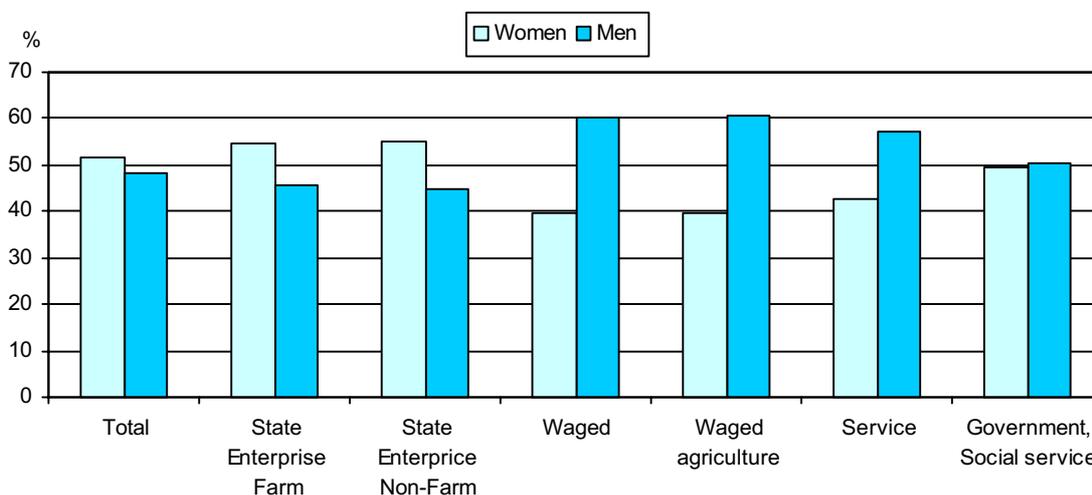
In Viet Nam, 86.4% of adults of working age are economically active, as measured by labour force participation rates. Economic activity rates for men and women are almost identical, at 86% for women and 86.8% for men. However women retire earlier than men in Viet Nam, at age 55 rather than age 60. Employment figures therefore, do not represent women aged 55-60. Similar to most developing countries, labour force participation is higher in rural (89.5%) than in urban areas (76.3%), due to the trend among urban populations toward prolonging education (Haughton et al 2001).

Economic activity as measured by labour force participation does not depict under-employment. In reality, just over half the adult population is considered to be under-employed, working less than 2,000 hours annually. The proportion of under-employed women has dropped substantially from 64% in 1993 to 52% in 1998. For men the rate was reduced from 59% to 53% over the same period (Haughton et al 2001).

Women constitute 52% of the total labour force. Despite similar participation rates, men and women are still concentrated in discrete occupations (see chart below). The variety of skilled occupations in urban areas in particular support a gendered division of labour. In rural areas 80% of jobs are in agriculture, so occupational choice is limited and few gender differences prevail. In urban areas however women are concentrated heavily in sales, light industry (especially textiles and garments), government and social services, with men dominating occupations such as mining, metal work and manufacturing. Areas in which women are under-represented include administration and scientific fields. Even within female-dominated occupations, such as the textile and garment industry and primary school teaching, men fill a disproportionate share of higher positions. Only 23% of economically active women are engaged in waged employment compared to 41% of men, and women's average hourly wage is only 78% of men's (FAO & UNDP 2002).

In the last two decades, since the Sixth National Congress of the Communist Party in 1986, and the inception of *doi moi*, Vietnamese economic and social life has undergone important changes. The transition to a market economy has generally led to the improvement of the economic situation of the country. GDP increased 8.9% annually, from 1993 to 1998, the fourth fastest rate in the world (Haughton et al 2001). People's living standards

Participation by Women and Men



Source: GSO, 2000.

have improved considerably through their increased incomes and the availability of a wider range of consumer goods and services.

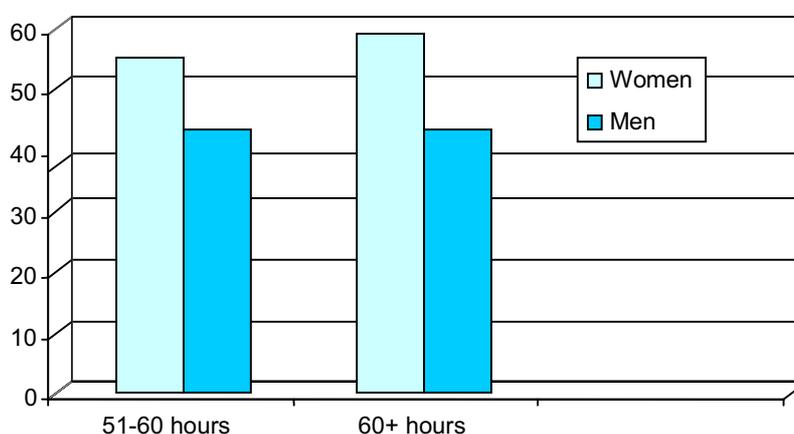
While it is generally recognized that the renovation process has provided new opportunities for both women and men, there is evidence of a negative impact on women - in terms of a loss of benefits, such as maternity leave allowance and childcare provision. In June 1994, maternity leave benefits were reduced from six months to four months. In order to cope with the lack of basic social services which was formerly subsidized, women have to work harder. The 1997-1998 Viet Nam Living Standards Survey (VLSS) shows that for all age groups, women work almost twice as long doing housework as men (Desai, 2000). However, this emphasis on housework does not mean that women spend less time on income-generating activities. Women represent the majority of all the people who work 51 to 60 hours per week, and over 61 hours per week (see chart below).

#### Gender Gaps and Issues in Labour and Economic Activity

While all adults recorded an increase in paid working hours over the period 1993-1998, the increase was most substantial for women, particularly those aged 25-34 (FAO & UNDP 2002). In-depth studies have shown that *women in rural Viet Nam are typically working about 16 to 18 hours per day; on average, about six to eight hours longer than men per day* (Government of Viet Nam-Donor-NGO Poverty Working Group 2000). Many women carry double responsibilities because they not only earn a living from work, but also fulfill traditional roles of mother and wife at home (Dalton et al 2002).

There are several negative consequences resulting from such a long working day. First, *women are quite clearly physically overworked*. Women, especially from rural areas, report a number of health problems as a result of this overwork. Second, *women have no time for social activities, or for learning experiences from others*. Women of ethnic minority backgrounds, in particular have little chance to participate in evening literacy classes even when they are available and relevant. Finally, *women are unable to participate in village meetings and decision-making* (Government of Viet Nam-Donor-NGO Poverty Working Group 2000).

**Heavy Workload Differentials Between Women and Men**  
(hours per week)



Source: GSO, 2000. 1997-1998 Viet Nam Living Standards Survey

### **A Need for Changing Gender Roles as Social and Economic Conditions Change**

Experience across the world shows that the willingness of men to increase their contribution to household and child-care tasks clearly lags behind the increase of women's economic contribution to the family. Investing in small-scale, appropriate household technologies which reduce women's workload, and in rural water and energy projects, can be effective ways of reducing the domestic workload of women. Over time, public education campaigns regarding the shared household responsibilities of men and women, preferably with the use of prominent men as positive examples, may lead to changes in attitude among men.

Various studies indicate that economic reform has intensified the social stratification in Vietnamese society. For those households that have capital to invest in production or have enough labour, an increased workload means new and increased job opportunities for earning income. But those households which lack capital or labour, relative to the number of mouths to feed, and households in which women are the main breadwinner, do not benefit from new opportunities as much. These households tend to be among the poorest families, especially in rural areas (Beresford, 1997).

For women in wealthier households, a higher income means that the loss of reproductive labour time can be partly offset by the use of services available in the market: prepared food, private tuition classes, private health-care services, etc. For the very poor, however, it means an inevitable decline in the quality of upbringing that their children receive and may also lead to the declining health of other family members (Beresford, 1997).

### **Women Have Less Access to Formal Credit**

An important macroeconomic issue of concern in Viet Nam is access to credit. Credit provides not only an important means of poverty alleviation, but also a method of permanently raising incomes and developing the rural economy. However, at present, the majority of credit is obtained through the informal sector, with women less likely to access formal loans than men. Two-thirds of all funds borrowers are male, only 33% of whom access loans from government banks. For women, only 18% of loans are provided through the formal sector, and the most common sources of credit are from relatives and other individuals. The use of private money lenders involves higher interest rates and for women it reflects a lack of collateral-based lending. While 41% of loans accessed by men require collateral, only 27% of women's loans are of this nature (FAO & UNDP 2002). Women's lack of collateral is related to their frequent absence from Land Use Certificates (see section on agriculture and land use).

Access to basic infrastructure resources, such as clean water supply, electricity, transport and markets, and an unpolluted environment, makes an enormous impact on women's workloads and improves the economic situations of women and their households. Such resources reduce the amount of time required for reproductive work and help to improve the quality of productive work, creating more opportunities for income-generating activities. At present, a programme on socio-economic development of the communes facing special difficulties in mountainous, border, deep-laying and remote regions inhabited by ethnic minority people (Programme 135) is being implemented. This programme focuses on small-scale infrastructure to assist the poorest communes. According to a recent assessment however, women and disadvantaged groups are often excluded from decision-making processes (Fritzen, 2000).



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# Gender Issues in Agriculture and Land Use

## Agricultural Development in Viet Nam

Three-quarters of the total population of Viet Nam lives in rural areas, with two-thirds of them dependent on farming for a living (UN Viet Nam, 1999). Since the implementation of the renovation policies of *doi moi*, in 1986, agricultural output and productivity have increased dramatically. Reforms in the agricultural sector transformed Viet Nam from a country experiencing extreme food insecurity into one of the world's largest exporters of rice, coffee and other agricultural commodities (UNCT 2002).

However high levels of rural poverty and food insecurity still prevail. The General Statistical Office notes that 94% of the families classified as living below the poverty line live and work in rural areas (GSO, 1999). This is reinforced by the *Joint Report of the Government-Donor-NGO Poverty Working Group*, which identifies an unbalanced pattern of growth and widening rural-urban gap, with per capita expenditures in urban areas growing twice as fast as rural areas in the 1993-1998 period (2000). People living in poverty are most often farmers with low levels of education and limited access to factors of production such as land, capital, technology, information and basic social services (UNCT 2002).

There is a need to consider explicitly the role of women in rural areas, as a 1994 National Symposium on *Women and Agriculture*, organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) found that men benefited more than women from the economic reforms of *doi moi*. A recent report on land ownership states:

Women belong to a disadvantaged group in rural Vietnamese society and female headed households are amongst the most disadvantaged groups among the poor population in the mountain areas (Hood, 2000).

## Status of Rural Women

Women are not a homogenous groups - they are diverse in their interests, priorities, and needs across region and within regions. However, rural women often are not aware of their legal rights due to their low education levels (compared to their urban counterparts) and lack of access to information. They work an average of 16 to 18 hours per day. If they live in the north, north-central and mountainous areas, or are single, it is likely that the average number of hours worked per day is even greater. This leaves women very little time to attend community meetings, listen to the radio or read books to increase their knowledge of their rights and learn about agricultural extension skills that are, in any case, usually directed toward men (NCFAW, MAFI, FAO, 1995).

## Gender Roles in Agriculture

Although there are vast differences within and between regions, in general in Viet Nam, more women than men are involved in agricultural cultivation and livestock production, as well as in the processing and selling of agricultural products. Since the mid 1990s women have taken over a larger share of the productive work and are more involved in making decisions regarding farm activities (Fyles et al 2001).

Rice is the predominant crop produced in Viet Nam. While men traditionally prepare the ground for rice planting, it is the role of women to transplant and look after the rice, and then to harvest, process and market the rice.

Aquaculture is also widespread in Viet Nam, with both men and women active in different roles. Women provide the labour for the feeding of fish on a daily basis and also dominate in small-scale processing, fish sauce production and marketing. The role of men focuses more on decision-making in determining the fish species, purchasing, netting and harvesting (FAO, 1997).

Women dominate income generation in rural production through processing, producing and selling food, trade, handicraft production and wage labour. Male income is derived mostly from waged labour, transportation and construction (FAO, 1997). In rural areas almost 84% of households raise some type of animal. Livestock maintenance forms a crucial proportion of a rural household's income portfolio. Women spend almost 30% of their

total labour effort in agricultural self-employment on livestock maintenance, compared to 20% for men (FAO & UNDP 2002).

### **Extension Services**

Extension and agricultural services enable farmers to make informed decisions about their production activities and to introduce new technologies. Extension services have the potential to play a key role in the productivity not only of individual farms but also of the country as a whole. Although women are assuming increasing responsibility in agricultural production, this gender shift is not reflected in the national policy for extension and technical services. National data report that women are less likely than men to participate in extension training, and that extension services tend not to respond to the specific needs of female farmers (Fyles et al 2001).

In depth studies conducted in conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) have revealed some of the reasons extension services are not reaching women:

In keeping with Vietnamese tradition, most extension programmes are oriented towards men. Extension staff are more likely to communicate with men rather than women, as they believe men are responsible for making decisions on production and family matters.

The majority of extension workers are men. Women tend to be less confident and make fewer demands in groups where both men and women are present. In some regions, adult women have far less formal education than men, which can have a negative influence on women's level of self-confidence and they may be unwilling to speak up or ask questions during a meeting.

Women are expected to work longer hours on both productive and reproductive work, leaving them little time to attend training.

Extension services are typically aimed to increase the use of new seed varieties, new animal breeds, and new technologies such as fertilizer, pesticides, and vaccines. As female-headed households usually have fewer resources and less adult labour than male-headed households do, these extension programmes are unlikely to be of much benefit to them.

Most extension training does not target women directly. Often the commune officials, Women's Union cadres and male heads of household who are trained, are expected to pass on this training to women farmers. In such cases the information does not always reach the women.

Finally, women face additional barriers where information is delivered in mixed groups. Many of the women interviewed in the MARD study reported that they did not feel comfortable in meetings where men were present and therefore did not attend. This is especially true for unmarried women, who are sometimes regarded with disapproval and mistrust by other villagers (Fyles et al 2001).

### **Gender Issues in Land Ownership**

Land ownership presents specific issues for women in Viet Nam. In 1993 the proclamation of the Land Law, which allowed the personal transfer of land, had major implications for gender equality (Long et al 2000). While the Land Law does not discriminate against women, most people in rural areas do not have knowledge of these laws and tend to follow their traditional practices, particularly in ethnic minority areas. Women are granted equal rights to men for all their land use and property rights, as clearly stated in the Constitution, Civil Code and Law on Marriage and Family. Yet traditionally, women are still considered dependent on their family or family-in-law for their access to land through their father, husband or brother.

Land allocation is based on categories that have restrictive implications for women. Land is allocated according to labour ages. People of working age receive a full proportion of land and those above or below working age receive half a full portion. Because of their earlier retirement age (55, compared to men at 60), women aged between 55 and 60 receive only half of men's land proportion in the same age group. Also, female-headed

households, which typically have their spouse absent, tend to receive less land due to their lack of laborers and their reliance on less strictly defined working ages (Nguyen Nhat Tuyen 1999). Female -operated farms, therefore cultivate only 54% of the land area cultivated by male-operated farms on average. Limited access to agricultural land implies less diversified economic activities in agriculture, with important negative consequences for food security and agricultural development (FAO & UNDP 2002).

The administration of Land Use Right Certificates (LURCs) also presents problems for women. Currently, it is most common for titling to be in the husband's name solely. The revised Law on Family and Marriage (2000) stipulates that land certificates for common land must list the names of both spouses, but as yet a program to re-issue LURCs to all households has not been developed. Women's names are still largely invisible in LURCs. This creates problems for women when they need to prove collateral for accessing loans, and also creates difficulties in claiming rights to the land during divorce settlements and in widowhood. Women themselves often are unaware of their rights in terms of LURCs, particularly women of ethnic minority backgrounds. The lack of female staff working in government land departments is noted also as a factor damaging to women's equal land rights. Male staff are reported often to be insensitive to gender issues when processing and managing land applications (Nguyen Duc Truyen 1999). Ensuring that the names of both husband and wife appear on LURCs is a Viet Nam Development Goal for 2005.

### **Gender Implications of Rural-Urban Migration**

Recent economic reforms have led to increased mobility, not only of goods but also of people. In terms of permanent migration, women are more likely to leave home when they marry and thus are traditionally more mobile than men. However with rapid economic development, there is a definite trend for men to migrate into cities and larger towns in search of wage labour. In these cases, women are left as the sole providers of the household and have to adopt the full operating tasks of the farm, in addition to taking care of all the household tasks (Le Thi, 1994). That women are being increasingly 'left behind' to take care of the agricultural work is confirmed by a variety of sources including government statistics, work by national researchers and international experts.

However it should be noted that reliable research into the long term effects rural-urban migration is lacking, and that the "feminization" of agriculture brought about by urban male migration is an area in need of further investigation.

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# Gender Issues in Health and Health-Care

Immediately following independence in 1945, the Government of Viet Nam made strong efforts to develop a public health-care system. Despite quite radical changes to the health system over the past decade, the health status and life expectancy of the population do not appear to have worsened, and may have improved (Haughton et al 2001). Such improved health status is consistent with improved underlying determinants of health including, peace, access to housing, water and sanitation and food.

Compared to many other developing countries in the region, Viet Nam has a higher life expectancy and a much lower maternal mortality ratio.

Life Expectancy 2000			Maternal Mortality 2000 (per 100,000 live births)	
	Women	Men		
<b>Viet Nam</b>	<b>70.6</b>	<b>65.9</b>	<b>Viet Nam</b>	<b>95</b>
Cambodia	58.6	53.9	Cambodia	440
Lao PDR	54.8	52.2	Lao PDR	650
Thailand	73.2	67.3	Thailand	44

Source: UNDP, 2002a.

General health needs are met by public health-care facilities available from the central to commune levels. The specific reproductive health needs of women are addressed through the maternal-child health care and family planning system, with the district health care centers providing the point of first referral for emergency and specialist medical and surgical services. Vital health indicators when compared to Viet Nam's level of economic development were good long before *doi moi*. Since then, the Government has continued to invest resources in the health sector in spite of budget constraints. Almost all communes have a commune health centre (CHC), with each employing an average of four health workers. More than 30% of CHCs are staffed with a doctor and 82% of them employ a midwife or an obstetric-pediatric assistant doctor. Fifty-two per cent of all villages have a community health worker. Health facilities have also been upgraded in terms of infrastructure and equipment (Ministry of Health, 2000a).

The growing private health sector has increased the availability of services offered to women. However, private health care is still beyond the means of many (NCFAW 2000). The provision of health-care services in many remote areas has improved, though there is some evidence that the health-care gap between affluent families and those living in poverty has in fact increased with market reforms. Studies indicate that 75% of families in poverty routinely purchase medications from pharmacies and self-treat without the consultation of a doctor (Haughton et al 2001). People of ethnic minority background, and those living in the most remote and mountainous communities still fare the worst in terms of health-care access.

Men and women experience different health problems. Women are more likely to report illness than men, but also return to work more quickly once having been ill. Women and girls are also more chronically malnourished than men and boys are (FAO & UNDP 2002). In 2000, malnutrition among women of reproductive age was 26.7%. In the same year, the anemia rate was 32.2% for women of reproductive age, compared to 9.4% for men of the same age. Young women are far more likely to be engaged in sex work than young men while young men suffer higher levels of injury and death from work place accidents and traffic accidents. In addition, the burden of responsibility for reproductive and family health issues (eg, child health and nutrition, family planning) is often placed on women. Men also need to share in these responsibilities and be targeted for health interventions so that they can play a more supportive and responsible role.

A detailed study conducted among young men and women in Ho Chi Minh City revealed discrete trends regarding health and social behavior. Young women exhibit depressive symptoms at a much higher rate than young men (27% prevalence, compared to 16% respectively), while young men report greater incidences of detrimental behaviour such as smoking, drinking alcohol and fighting with weapons (Bui Cong Thanh et al 2002). Such studies indicate the importance of sex-disaggregated data collection within the health sector to ensure prevention and treatment programmes that build in gender needs so to maximise effectiveness. At present, general health statistics collected by the Ministry of Health are not routinely sex disaggregated in Viet Nam, thus potentially concealing important trends in the gendered nature of ill health and health care needs. Information, education and communication materials that target issues without any analysis of gender equality may alienate more than half the target group.

### **Smoking**

Cigarette smoking is a major public health concern for Viet Nam. The prevalence of smoking among men in Viet Nam is one of the highest globally, estimated at up to 70% of men. Over a quarter of young people aged 15 to 24 years old smoke, the overwhelming majority of whom are male. Currently few women (under 4%) are reported to be smokers. However, public health officials are concerned that young women are susceptible to the same marketing forces seen in developed countries, and are at risk of increasing their smoking prevalence. The World Health Organization has estimated that if the situation does not change radically, over 10% of Vietnamese alive today will die prematurely from the effects of tobacco use (Fishburn 2002).

The Government has launched an aggressive campaign to address this tremendous health burden, issuing its national tobacco control policy in August 2000. The campaign includes initiatives on new legislation, awareness campaigns, intervention programs to help smokers quit, and medical research (Fishburn 2002).

### **Reproductive Health and Contraception Use**

Considerable achievements have been made in the areas of reproductive health and family planning. The percentage of delivery assisted by health professional has increased from 55% during 1990-4 to 71% from 1995-1997. During the last ten years, mortality from complications appears to have been reduced nationally. However, maternal mortality due to obstetric complications and peri-natal mortality remains high in disadvantaged areas (Ministry of Health, 2000b). The prevalence of contraception usage is also increasing, with 55.9% of married couples using modern family planning methods.

As such, the total fertility rate (TFR)<sup>1</sup> has fallen to 2.3 children per woman in 2000, compared to 3.1 children per woman in 1994, and 3.8 children per woman in 1989. Fertility has declined in every group of women, but the decline is much more significant in the prime age groups of 25-29, 30-34 and 35-39 (GSO, 2000). In 1999, Viet Nam received the Population Award from the United Nations for its achievements in family planning.

Choice is limited, however, in reproductive health and family planning. Reproductive health services are not readily available in many remote and mountainous areas, and even amongst the general population the mix of contraceptives used is limited, and relies heavily on the IUD. Of all married women using contraception, 62% use an IUD (NCPFP 2001). High IUD dependence has been linked to increased gynecological health problems such as reproductive tract infections (Government of Viet Nam-Donor-NGO Poverty Working Group (2000)). The popularity of the IUD is explained in part by its cost effectiveness and its consistent, extensive supply. Female sterilization, male condoms and the oral contraceptive pill are slowly gaining acceptance and female hormonal long-term injections have recently been piloted and extended to 33 provinces (Poverty Task Force 2002).

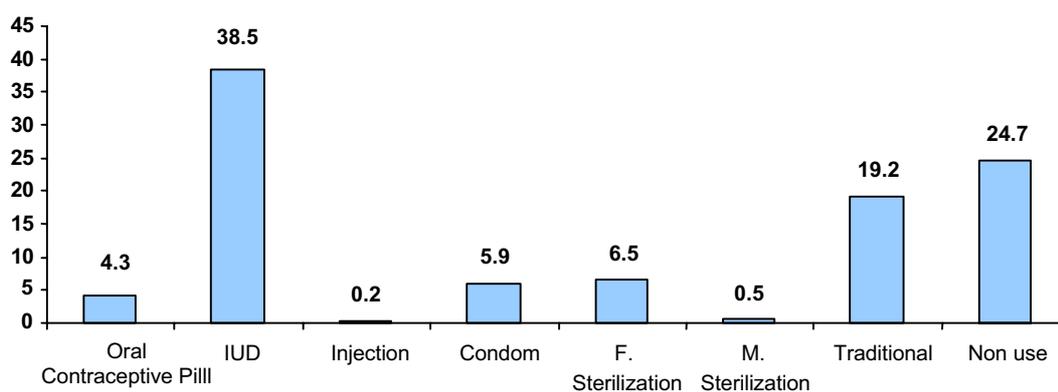
<sup>1</sup> TFR indicates how many children a woman would bear in her lifetime according to current rates.

Viet Nam continues to have a high abortion rate, at 2.5 per woman, which indicates that on average, every woman will have 2.5 abortions according to current trends (NCPFP, 2001). Post-abortion contraception rates remain low, often due to a lack of information and misconceptions among clients and providers. In addition, access to contraception for young, unmarried women remains difficult, with married women constituting the primary target for existing services (Poverty Task Force 2002).

The perception that women, not men, are responsible for contraception is still widespread, despite the fact that men typically exert control over family planning choices. Studies have shown that women often are unable to negotiate reproduction choices due to their low status within the household, and the prevailing preference for boy children. Women report that the social importance of delivering a son puts considerable pressure on them to keep bearing children that the family cannot afford to support, until a boy is delivered. Women also report being beaten by their husbands for using contraception without their husbands' "permission" (Government of Viet Nam-Donor-NGO Poverty Working Group, (2000).

There is a strong correlation between a woman's level of education and her use of reproductive health services and her reproductive behavior. Educated women are more likely to receive pre-natal care, to use contraception to delay their first pregnancy, to lower total fertility and to increase child spacing. It is well established that child bearing at a very young or very late age, inadequate spacing between children and having a large number of children are important determinants of maternal mortality. Emphasis therefore must be given to improving girls' education. Information and communication programs need to be designed also in a way that they effectively reach women with low levels, or no education. As well, to date, family planning strategies have not adequately addressed the area of male responsibility for contraception (NCFW 2000).

**Chart 1.**  
**Use of Contraceptive Method by Married Women**



Source: NCPFP, 2001

## HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS is an increasingly significant problem for Viet Nam, along with other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The first HIV infection was reported in Viet Nam in 1990, with AIDS first recorded in 1993. In 2002, a cumulative total of 54,106 cases of HIV infection was recorded, with 7,990 cases of AIDS infection on record (Ministry of Health 2002). However the United Nations in Viet Nam estimates that the number of people living with HIV was in fact around 160,000 in 2000 (UN 2002). To date, over 4,000 deaths have been attributed to AIDS in Viet Nam (Ministry of Health 2002).

AIDS is a development issue. More than 95% of the world's estimated 33.4 million people infected with HIV/AIDS live in developing countries. It is also an issue of gender equality. The epidemic is spread furthest and fastest in countries where women have low social status and are unable to assert their right to protected sex, where extramarital sex is common amongst men, or where women are forced to exchange sex for money and advancement (UNDP 1999).

Official figures from the Ministry of Health record injecting drug users (IDUs) as the primary transmission group for HIV in Viet Nam. However since 2000 the incidence of new reported cases amongst this group has begun to decline, consistent with world trends of the epidemic. Heterosexual sex is now increasing in proportion as a means of transmission. It should be noted, however, that the ambiguous legal status and social stigma attached to homosexuality and homosexual sex has led to a complete absence of officially recorded cases of male to male sexual transmission.

HIV infection is most prevalent in men (85% of all recorded cases), predominantly within the 20-29 age group. At 15%, Viet Nam is well below the global average of proportional infection rate for women (41%). This suggests that the epidemic is in the early stages of a pattern similar to that seen in Thailand and Myanmar (UNDP 1999).

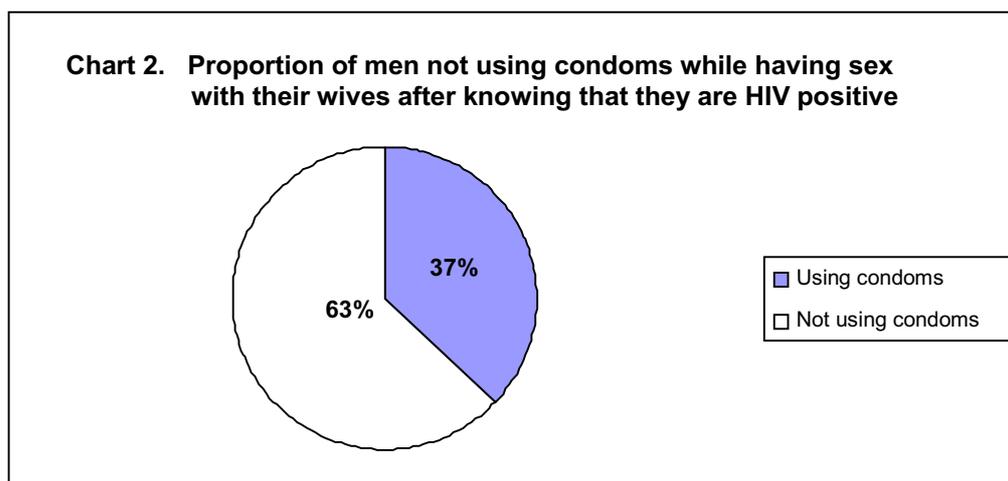
Efforts to combat the epidemic are hindered by the prevailing social prejudices. Government policy to address sex workers and injecting drug users has been to treat them as "social evils" to be targeted by the criminal justice system. Therefore those most at risk are least likely to report their infection, and are typically the most difficult to reach with awareness and prevention programs. The "social evils" approach also contributes to social prejudice against people living with HIV/AIDS. There is evidence that women face particular discrimination in the community, as their HIV status is often connected in the public eye to sexual and "deviant" behavior - behavior that is considered even less acceptable for Vietnamese women than for men (NCFAW 2000).

Women are in a vulnerable position regarding HIV/AIDS due to men's reluctance to use condoms and women's lack of power to determine their own sexual relations and negotiate safe sex. In his study on men infected with HIV/AIDS, Le Dang Ha and his colleagues found that less than 40% of men who were aware of their HIV positive status used condoms when having sex with their wives (Chart 2).

Condom usage is still minimal in Viet Nam. In the absence of a commitment from the national government, some local authorities have opposed condom-focused promotion of HIV/AIDS prevention, arguing that it legitimizes and even encourages casual and commercial sex. Similarly, the promotion of safe needle practices has not been a part of the national strategy (Poverty Task Force 2002). The female condom has been trialed recently, with encouraging results, particularly among sex workers (UNAIDS 2000). The female condom has potential to empower women in their sexual health choices. However men's continued, and often unsafe use of sex workers needs to be addressed in a comprehensive manner. The double standard of gender relations that allows thousands of men to buy sex every day, has yet to be addressed in Viet Nam (UNDP 2002b).

The incidence of men buying sex from men has received even less attention. Male sex workers in Viet Nam report servicing predominantly Vietnamese clients who typically are married, and who fail to use condoms when having sex with men. Interviews with male sex workers reveal alarmingly low levels of understanding of HIV transmission on their part, and ignorance to the value of safer sex practices. Homosexuality has been included recently in the government's "social evils" campaign, making it increasingly difficult to identify and reach men who practice male to male sexual behaviors.

The scant research available indicates that the "underground" nature of male sex work has created a highly vulnerable sexual sub-group. Female sex workers on the whole, are much more aware of safer sex practices



Source: Le Dang Ha et al, 2000

(Wilson et al 1999 and Doussantousse et al 2002). Male sex work, and even male to male sexual transmission of HIV does not feature in the government's HIV/AIDS strategy.

HIV/AIDS needs to be understood not only in terms of the disease but also in terms of gender. Women are vulnerable to infection due to cultural attitudes that make it inappropriate for them to be knowledgeable about sex or to suggest condom use; the common link between substance abuse and commercial sex, and the economic need felt by some women that forces them to resort to sex work. Women also face the added burden of assuming a care-taker responsibility for those who are ill with HIV/AIDS. The burden of labour for women caring for family and friends with HIV is unrecognized in Viet Nam's national policies.

Men are vulnerable to infection due to cultural attitudes that make it difficult for them to admit to gaps in their knowledge about sex. Other factors fuel the spread of the epidemic: the link between socializing and alcohol use - which heightens risky behaviors, social pressures to use sex workers, the social stigma of male to male sexual behaviors, the frequency of male drug use, and the number of male occupations that involve migration and thus disrupt family life (UNIFEM 2002).

The combating of HIV/AIDS forms part of the greater Millenium Development Goal, and Viet Nam Development Goal to improve health status in Viet Nam by 2010. To halt the spread of the epidemic by 2010 will require a massive effort, including a stronger focus on high risk behavior as outlined above, a review of policies toward sex workers and IDUs and an increased capacity to coordinate the response to the epidemic (Poverty Task Force 2002).

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# Gender-Based Violence

Violence against women and girls is often referred to as “gender-based violence” because it evolves in part from women’s subordinate gender status in society. In most cultures, traditional beliefs, norms and social institutions legitimize and therefore perpetuate violence against women (UNIFEM 2002a).

The use of the term “gender-based violence” provides a new context in which to examine and understand the long-standing phenomenon of violence against women. It shifts the focus from women as victims to gender and the unequal power relationships between women and men created and maintained by gender stereotypes as the basic underlying cause of violence against women.

In 1993, the United Nations offered the first official definition of such violence when the General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. Article 1 of the Declaration defines violence against women as:

*any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.*

This includes physical, sexual and psychological violence such as domestic violence; burning or acid throwing; sexual abuse, including rape and incest by family members; female genital mutilation; female feticide and infanticide; sexual slavery; forced pregnancy; honor killings; dowry-related violence; violence in armed conflict such as murder; and emotional abuse such as coercion and abusive language.

Abduction of women and children for prostitution, and forced marriage are also examples of gender-based violence. Such violence not only occurs in the family and in the general community, but is sometimes also condoned or perpetuated by the state through policies or the actions of agents of the state such as the police, military or immigration authorities, the majority of whom are men (UNIFEM 2002a).

Viet Nam has ratified most of the international conventions related to the elimination of violence against women and the issue has been dealt with in a range of national laws. Rape, prostitution and trafficking of persons are included under the penal code and sexual harassment and discrimination against women in the labour market is prohibited under the labor code. However most cases of gender-based violence are not reported within the formal system, so its prevalence is often underreported, and it is rarely addressed by the law.

Recent studies show that gender-based violence appears to be quite widespread in Viet Nam in all regions. It occurs in both urban and rural locations, and in families from all education and socio-economic levels, (Vu Manh Loi et al 1999). The violence takes many forms including neglect, verbal abuse, beatings and forced sex. The incidence of gender-based violence complaints in the criminal courts is increasing, the most common form of which is abuse of a woman by her husband (Tran Quoc Tu 1997).

Gender-based violence is typically viewed as a “family problem” in which outsiders should be involved only as a last resort. As such, few formal steps have been taken to address the causes or the consequences of gender-based violence, either through the health-care system, the legal system, local government, the schools, mass organizations or the media.

It should be noted that there is a significant lack of data on gender-based violence. To date, there has not been a national representative survey on gender-based violence that investigates the various forms of violence, its prevalence and frequency, its determinants, causes and consequences. The data presented in this Gender Kit is obtained from a number of small surveys and focus group interviews conducted across Viet Nam. Against this backdrop, it is not

accurate to generalize the available data and findings to the Vietnamese population as a whole. However, these small surveys do however offer some interesting findings.

In women's focus group studies conducted across Viet Nam, high levels of physical violence have been noted. In one village group it was estimated that 70% of husbands subjected their wives to regular physical violence. In another village focal group, it was estimated that 40% of wives were beaten regularly (Government of Viet Nam-Donor-NGO Poverty Working Group, 2000).

Research conducted by the Viet Nam Women's Union, based on a survey of victims and perpetrators of domestic violence, indicates potentially a similar situation, showing that both men and women generally consider it acceptable for a man to verbally abuse and beat his wife in order to punish and educate her if she insults him or behaves against his will, or against family and social norms. The small study revealed that only 3.5% of the men and 23% of the women surveyed consider the beating of wives to be unacceptable (VWU 2001).

Several other studies indicate that domestic violence is considered acceptable in most families and communities in Viet Nam, provided the woman is not severely physically injured. Only very serious and systematic abuse of women, which is considered to severely damage the husband-and-wife relationship, is recognized as "violence" (NCFW 2000).

When asked why they beat their wives, Vietnamese men typically give the excuse of inherent characteristics such as their hot temper, their impatience or drunkenness. Vietnamese studies indicate that economic hardship and alcohol abuse are strongly correlated to incidences of violence against women. Other major sites of gender-based violence include issues of sexuality (adultery, jealousy, and sexual negotiations) and differences in opinion over child rearing and relationships with friends and relatives. Very few people, including the victims and perpetrators of violence as well as government officials and health workers, recognize that such violence is rooted in unequal gender relations and gender stereotypes (UNCT 2002).

It is known that on average the higher the education level of a husband and wife, the lower the rate of verbal abuse, physical abuse, prohibiting the wife's movements, and forced sex. This correlation is believed to be linked also to poverty. High rates of violence and low levels of education are correlated strongly to poverty. Also, gender equality within the household appears to be a key variable. In households in which the husband and wife both earn income and make expenditure decisions, the levels of violence are lower (Vu Manh Loi et al 1999).

This is not to understate, however, the prevalence of gender-based violence in all levels of society. It occurs in all regions of the country and within all social strata (Le Thi Phuong Mai, 1998; Vu Manh Loi et al, 1999).

It is thus necessary to develop a more comprehensive approach to address gender-based violence. Such work could include: 1) improving information and awareness of the prevalence, causes and effects of violence, especially among leaders and policy makers; 2) mass social communication campaigns of Zero Tolerance for violence against women; and 3) expanded provision of a range of services for women who suffer violence, including counseling, intervention and legal services which would require the scaling up of existing pilot programmes.

### **Human Trafficking**

The international community first denounced trafficking in the 1949 Convention for the Suppression on the Trafficking in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others. Under CEDAW states are also obliged to eliminate discrimination and must take all appropriate measures to suppress all forms of traffic in women (UNIFEM 2002 (b)). In addition, there are two other important instruments related to trafficking: the 2000 Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography; and the 2000 Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially

Women and Children, Supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime. Viet Nam ratified the former in 2001 and is currently considering ratification of the latter.

Trafficking in human beings is a growing phenomenon all over the world. In Viet Nam, like in other countries, the illegal and clandestine nature of human trafficking makes it difficult to obtain reliable data. Commonly-quoted statistics on human trafficking show that worldwide a minimum of 700,000 people are trafficked annually and the number might exceed 2 million (US Department of State). In South-East Asia, there are an estimated 225,000 women and children who have been trafficked (US Department of State). It is estimated that since 1990, at least ten thousand Vietnamese women and children have been sold, mainly to work in the sex industry (Kelly and Le Bach Duong, 1999). It is believed that one third of the 55,000 individuals working in the Cambodian sex trade are under the age of 18, and that most are Vietnamese nationals (CATW 1999).

Although trafficking is often linked with women and girls being sold into prostitution, it is now recognized that this is only one part of a much larger picture that includes trafficking for forced marriage, adoption and labour exploitation, including begging, sweatshop and domestic labour, as well as other forms of illegal employment. The trafficking of boy children for sex has received little global attention also, until recently. It is even more difficult to estimate the prevalence of trafficking in boys, but it is known that many children in the sex trade in Southeast Asia and across the world are male, including Vietnamese boys (US Department of State 2001).

Viet Nam is considered largely a source country for trafficking, primarily for forced labour and sexual exploitation, not only across borders but also domestically within Viet Nam (US Department of State 1998). There are three known trafficking routes through which Vietnamese women and children are sent cross-border: i) from northern Viet Nam to China mainly for marriage, ii) southern Viet Nam to Cambodia and, iii) further abroad, either directly or through Cambodia, mainly for sex work. It is widely reported that women from several Southern provinces are being sold to Taiwanese men for marriage. Almost all of them were organized by intermediaries, the bulk of whom were women themselves (UNCT 2002).

Many victims of trafficking receive no earnings, especially very young women. They are forced to work long hours and if in the sex trade, often are not permitted to refuse clients. Not surprisingly, a high proportion of victims report medical and health problems. Many, especially the teenagers, contract sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. Understandably, there is a high incidence of mental health problems reported amongst victims of trafficking.

### **Causes of Trafficking in Viet Nam**

Trafficking is often seen as a development problem from the *supply* side. That is, it is argued that young women and children are forced (or pressured) into the sex industry and illegal labour industry by poverty and a lack of alternative employment and income earning opportunities. Increasingly, however, prostitution and trafficking are also being seen as a development issue from the *demand* side. The demand for the services of prostitutes and for women and children to be trafficked, both within the region and to more developed countries is clearly a function of development. It is a function of both the level of development, which creates both the supply and demand, and the *nature* of that development (UNIFEM 2002 (b)).

Research on trafficking has indicated that victims are not necessarily the poorest and least educated in their community. In some cases, women with higher levels of education have been trafficked because they are aware of high potential earnings elsewhere and may seek opportunities for higher income. Also, not all poor communities fall victim to human trafficking. Hence relative poverty, rather than absolute poverty, may be a factor that increases the potential risks of individuals being trafficked.



There is a growing recognition that gender imbalances, where women have a lower status than men in society, and where their bargaining power is considerably reduced, are the structural causes that contribute strongly to the vulnerability of women to trafficking.

There is also research which indicates that the provision of credit, training and other support enable women to become economically active is insufficient to combat trafficking. It is maintained that, unless the structural causes of gender discrimination are comprehensively addressed, trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and children will persist (UNCT 2002).

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# Gender Issues in Ethnic Minority Cultures

The largest ethnic group, constituting a majority in Viet Nam, is the Kinh (Viet), comprising 86% of the population (Dang Nghiem Van et al., 2000). People of ethnic minority backgrounds are defined as those who have Vietnamese nationality and reside in Viet Nam, and who do not share the identity, language and other cultural characteristics of the Kinh people. At ten million, the ethnic minority population of Viet Nam is significantly larger than the entire population of Laos (Poverty Task Force 2002). Ethnic groups are considered often to represent one homogenous group of people, yet in reality there is a high degree of diversity amongst Viet Nam's 53 different ethnic minority groups with regard to language, agricultural practices, kinship systems and gender relations.

The largest minority groups are listed below, with the remaining groups having a population of less than 100,000 in Viet Nam, half of which have populations of less than 10,000 people. The majority of these groups live in remote and mountainous regions in the north of Viet Nam, the central highlands, and the Mekong Delta.

## Largest Ethnic Minority Groups in Viet Nam

Ethnic minority group	Approximate population	Ethnic minority group	Approximate population
Tay	1,190,000	Nung	706,000
Thai	1,040,000	H'mong	558,000
Muong	914,000	Dao	474,000
Hoa	900,000	Giarai	242,000
Khmer	895,000	Ede	195,000

Source: Dang Nghiem Van et al, 2000

People of ethnic minority backgrounds constitute 14% of the population, yet they account for 29% of the country's poor (Poverty Task Force 2002). Seventy-five per cent of ethnic minority people suffer poverty in comparison to 31% of the Kinh (GSO, 2000). While people of ethnic minority groups have shared in recent economic gains, research demonstrates that these gains have been modest and that the gap between the socio-economic development of minorities and the majority population is actually widening. This situation has arisen despite government efforts and programmes to support the development of its ethnic minority peoples (Poverty Task Force 2002). The reduction of material inequalities suffered by people of ethnic minority backgrounds is a Viet Nam Development Goal for the period 1990-2015.

Women within ethnic minority groups often suffer more greatly from the effects of poverty than men, due to a lack of decision-making power, lower education standards and fewer opportunities, making them the poorest of the poor. A recent joint report for the Government-Donor-NGO Poverty Working Group states that the particular problems of ethnic minority women comprise "heavy workloads, limited decision-making power within the households (particularly on reproductive decisions), high levels of domestic violence and low access to education and knowledge" (2000).

### Legal Issues

Although President Ho Chi Minh included explicit reference to ethnic minority peoples as being members of Vietnamese society in the 1946 constitution, the civil rights of ethnic minority peoples were only enshrined into law in 1981.

The government body responsible for ethnic minority issues is the Committee for Ethnic Minorities and Mountainous Areas (CEMMA). Although the Decision of the Prime Minister approving the socio-economic development program for especially difficult mountainous and remote communes does not mention women's or gender issues, the framework for external assistance to ethnic minority development does highlight the role of women in health issues.

For many ethnic minority groups, customary laws which have endured either in written or oral forms prevail. Many customary laws continue to influence communities, parallel to the formal, modern system. Customary laws often are invoked to settle conflict, and particularly with regard to social relations within families and marriage.

The lack of access to legal education and counselling for ethnic minority people is a problem (Bergling et al, 1998). To rectify this, the Government is working with donors to increase the legal literacy skills of ethnic minorities through scholarship programmes. Sex disaggregated data on scholarships is not available, although it is likely that women are under-represented.

### **Literacy and Education**

In contrast to the national average, ethnic minority groups have high illiteracy rates. Most of the 6% of Viet Nam's illiterate population live in the remote rural and mountainous areas and most of them are people of ethnic minority backgrounds (Poverty Task Force 2002). Viet Nam has a rich diversity of languages, some spoken by only very small numbers of people. Research is lacking in this area and statistics are not available for the coverage and levels of literacy in ethnic minority languages. What is known, is that a large proportion of ethnic minority people in mountainous areas, especially women cannot read and write in any language and are not fluent in spoken Vietnamese (Poverty Task Force 2002).

School enrolment rates for children of ethnic minorities vary, but typically they are lower than those of the national average and frequently reflect more substantial gender gaps, although this is reversed for some groups (see table on next page). The reasons for the lower rate of ethnic minority girls attending school range from poverty, the need for labour in the home and fields, to parental attitudes that girls do not need education. There are difficulties faced by the schooling system for ethnic minority children due to the use of Kinh language that inhibits ethnic minorities understanding the lessons, as well as the remote distance of schools.

Laws which are intended to safeguard girls' participation in school, such as the Marriage and Family Law and Labour Law are not adequately enforced. Educational research which influences policy development often has not considered gender issues in its analysis of the education system in Viet Nam, and standard statistical information on education has typically not been disaggregated by sex (NCFAW 2000).

### **Health**

High infant and under five child mortality rates correlate with high concentrations of ethnic minorities (Poverty Task Force 2002). The major health issues for ethnic minority women and their families are malaria, malnutrition, respiratory and gynaecological infections. Poor health is due to the isolated location in which many ethnic minorities live, combined with the lack of access to clean water, lack of infrastructure and equipment, high fertility rates, and poor quality soil that leads to inadequate food supply. The low number and quality of community health stations in remote areas prevents treatment being adequate to improve women's and family health (Community Health Research Unit, 1996).

### **Matrilocal and Matrilineal Traditions**

Although patrilineal practices are dominant in the majority of ethnic groups, matrilineal practices, where inheritance through the mother's line or family, are still dominant in several ethnic groups, such as those of the

**Table 1. School Enrolment Rates (percentage) by Ethnic Group and Sex**

	Primary			Lower secondary		
	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Overall</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Overall</i>
Kinh	93.4	93.5	93.4	64.0	65.5	64.8
Hoa	92.9	94.5	93.7	53.1	50.4	51.7
Khmer	75.3	77.3	76.3	21.2	23.8	22.5
<b>Central highlands</b>						
Gia-rai	65.1	67.6	66.4	14.5	15.2	14.9
Ba-na	60.4	55	57.8	8.9	9.0	8.9
Xo-dang	59.3	64.7	62.2	7.1	12.7	10.1
<b>Northern Uplands</b>						
Tay	94.4	94.9	94.7	55.2	47.1	51.0
Thai	80.5	87.2	83.9	30.5	33.6	32.1
Muong	94	94.9	94.5	53.9	50.8	52.3
Nung	88.9	89.7	89.3	41.6	37.0	39.2
Hmong	31.5	51.5	41.5	1.6	7.5	4.5
Dao	68.8	73.7	71.4	11.8	11.9	11.8

Source: Poverty Task Force 2002

Malayo-Polynesian group, including the Gia Rai and Ede. In some matrilineal groups, maternal uncles have full authority over nieces and nephews. For example, in the Bru Van Kieu group, the maternal uncle still receives one-third of the niece's marriage gifts.

Matrilocal practices, where the newly married couple live with the parents of the bride, are also widespread in the Malayo-Polynesian language groups. The woman chooses the husband in the cultures of the Ede, Gia Rai, Hre and Muong ethnic groups. The children of couples of the Cham, Ede and Gia Rai take the name of the wife's family, and men in the Lo Lo group take the wife's family name.

Most ethnic minority groups however are patrilineal, with the eldest son designated as successor, and cultural practices that favour the males in the family. In the H'mong group, marriage by kidnapping is still common, with the future husband demanding a wedding from the women's parents. This practice has been the cause of a great deal of unhappiness (Dang Nghiem Van, 2000).

#### **Viet Nam Development Goal for Ethnic Minorities**

The promotion of development among ethnic minority communities is a Viet Nam Development Goal for 2010. The strategy for development includes preserving and developing minority languages, ensuring land rights and increasing representation of people of ethnic minority within the Vietnamese Government (Poverty Task Force 2002).



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# Women's Participation and Gender Equality Issues in Legislature

The rate of women holding seats in parliament is a significant indicator of the status of gender equality in any country. As of 2002 in the Eleventh term of the National Assembly, women held 27.3% of parliamentary seats in Viet Nam, the highest percentage for the Asian region and a significantly greater proportion than for many developed nations.

The relatively high rate of female participation in parliament reflects a traditional commitment to the promotion of women's participation in leadership in Viet Nam. In its first Constitution of 1946, the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam committed itself to promote equality for both women and men. President Ho Chi Minh emphasized that, "*Our party and government should have specific plans to train, promote and empower women in all aspects including leadership*" (Ho Chi Minh, 1960). Women received the right to vote and to stand for election in 1946, although the first woman was not elected to parliament until 1976 (UNDP 2002).

The journey by Vietnamese women to the political leadership has been an uneven one. During the term from 1970-1975, women made up 32% of the National Assembly (NA). However, in the following term (1976-

1981) immediately after the war ended, men returned back to their previously held positions. Women's representation decreased and reached its lowest point of 17.8% in the term 1986-1992 (NCFAW, 2000).

In 1994, the Party Central Party issued Directive No. 37, which was designed to increase women's participation in political leadership. It states that all levels of Government and Party should aim to have at least 20% of elected positions filled by women. As a result, the percentage of women in the Central Party Committees increased from 8.2% in the term of 1991-1996 to 10.5% in the term 1996-2001 and for the first time, a woman was appointed the Vice-President of the National Assembly, while two women were made chairpersons of the NA committees (out of 8 in total).

In 2002 the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women set a target of 30% female representation for the 2002 elections of the Eleventh term of the National Assembly. While the target was not met, the proportion of women in the National Assembly did rise from 26.2% to 27.3% in 2002 (NCFAW 2002). However, the number of vice-presidents was reduced from five to three, with no women representatives returned to this prestigious position in the Eleventh term.

There is a clear gender division of labour within the different committees of the current National Assembly. The two committees currently chaired by women are of the traditional "soft" social portfolios; that is, the Committee for Social Affairs and the Committee for Culture, Education, Youth and

Viet Nam has the highest rate of women in parliament for the Asian region, and the second highest – after New Zealand (29.2%) – for the whole of the Asia-Pacific region. Only fourteen countries in the world have a higher representation of women in parliament.

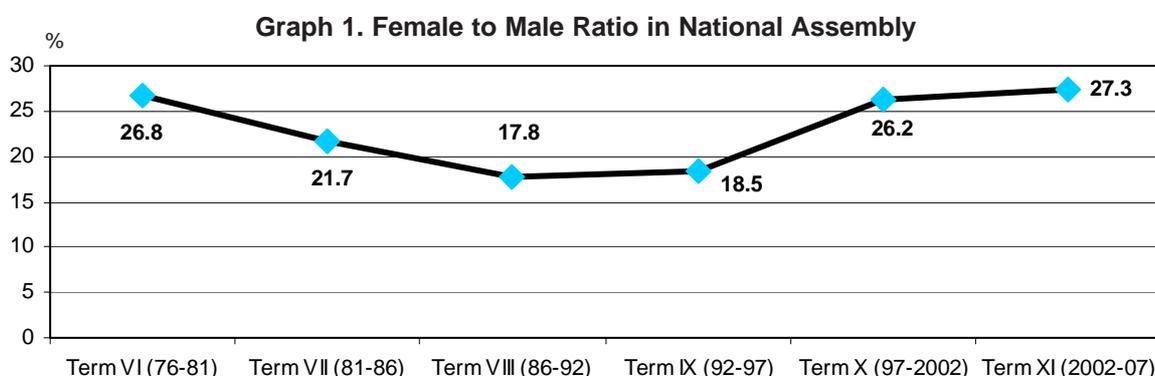
## Women in Asia-Pacific Parliaments

Country	Percentage of women in parliament
New Zealand	29.2
<b>Viet Nam</b>	<b>27.3</b>
East Timor DR	26.1
Australia	25.3
Lao PDR	25.0
China PR	21.8
Korea DPR	20.1
Philippines	17.8
Singapore	11.8
Malaysia	10.4
Thailand	9.2
Cambodia	9.0
Indonesia	8.0
Republic of Korea	5.9

Source Inter-Parliamentary Union 2002.

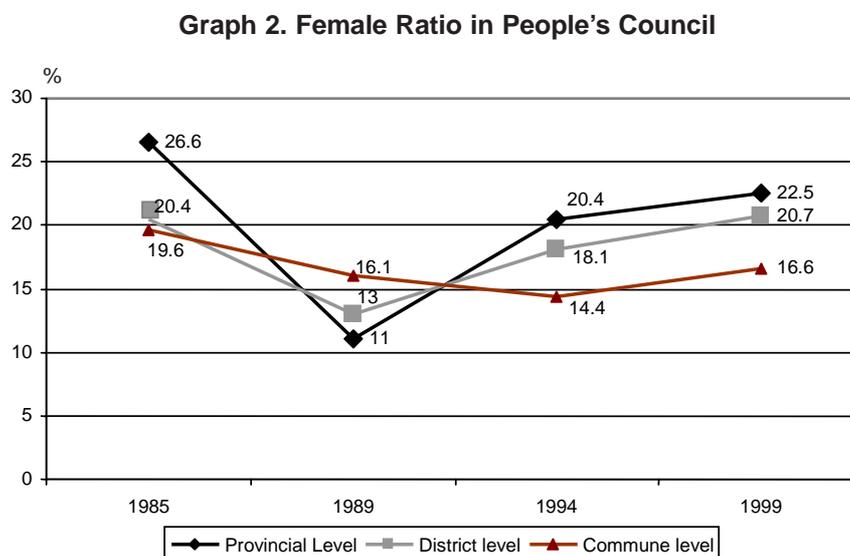
Children. In addition, the three female Ministers have similar portfolios: Ministry and Director of People, Family and Children Committee, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs.

Women's representation in the National Assembly increased from 17.8% in the term 1976-1981, to 27.3% in the term 2002-2007 (Graph 1).



Source: The National Assembly Office

The female ratio in the People's Council at different levels has increased in the last three terms but has not yet achieved the set target of 20% to 30% of female members at all levels. As part of the post-Beijing commitments, NCFAW conducted training for 18,000 women from every province of Viet Nam, who were standing as candidates in the local People's Council elections. The percentage of women elected to People's Councils at all levels increased in these elections, held in November 1999 (Graph 2).



Source: The National Assembly Office, 1997, and NCFAW, 2000.

The percentage of women in central government administration is still very low. For example, in the term 1997-2002, 12.5% of the positions of minister or equivalent were held by women, whilst only 9.1% of vice-minister or equivalent positions were held by women. At the local level, women only made up 4.9% of the membership in Provincial People committee, 6.6% at the district level and 4.5% at the commune/ward level. Very few women are in the positions of president or vice-president (GCOP, 1997).

The increase in women's representation in leading positions in the last few years shows that Vietnamese women today are in the process of active involvement in political leadership and decision making. This has been achieved through the strong commitment and support of the Government and the great efforts of women themselves. However, it does not mean that their path to power is smooth. The small percentage of women attaining high-level positions, as well as the clear traditional gender division of labour within sectors, still illustrates that further work needs to be done to increase the role of women in leadership.

### **Mainstreaming Women and Mainstreaming Gender**

While steady progress is being made to promote and improve women's participation in the legislature, it is important that efforts also focus on integrating gender equality in the process. These are two different, but equally important approaches to mainstreaming gender equality. Having increased numbers of women in the legislature does not ensure that laws and policies will be sensitive to gender differences. Similarly, gender mainstreaming could be realized with little participation by women. As long as there is a gender perspective (by male and female decision-makers) that takes into account the potentially different impact of policies and programmes on women and men - and on different groups of women and men, it is possible to mainstream gender.

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# International Organizations with Initiatives on Gender Equality and Women's Issues

## United Nations and Associated Agencies

### **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)**

Address	Gender Focal Point, 3 Nguyen Gia Thieu, Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 942 4208
Fax	(84 4) 942 3257
e-mail	FAO-VNM@fao.org.vn

FAO has supported the preparation of:

“Gender Differences in the Transitional Economy of Viet Nam” which presents an analysis of gender issues based on data from the Viet Nam Living Standards Survey, together with UNDP and NCFAW

a project proposal to develop gender equality in Land Law implementation strategies for combating rural poverty and food insecurity

FAO has prepared a technical cooperation project to strengthen the capacity of national institutions to formulate and implement gender-sensitive policy and action programmes in the agricultural and rural sector. The Integrated Pest Management (IPM) programme of FAO is recently strengthened by a new second phase, actively tackling gender issues in collaboration with a number of bilateral donors — particularly Australia, the Netherlands, and Norway — and increasing the number of women with farmer trainer schools.

### **International Labour Organization (ILO)**

Address	UN Apartment Building 2E Van Phuc, Kim Ma Street, Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 846 5100
Fax	(84 4) 846 5101
e-mail	ilo-esp@hn.vnn.vn

The ILO aims to enhance equality of opportunity and treatment in the workforce and workplace in collaboration with its constituent government, worker and employer organizations. The ILO's strategy is to integrate gender concerns into all its activities while at the same time carrying out women-specific programmes and projects where these are needed. In Viet Nam, the ILO promotes equal treatment of women workers through a project on Training and Information Dissemination on Women Workers Rights, coordinated by the Centre for Study on Women Workers of the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs. A sub-regional project on *Strengthening Trade Union Action on Women Workers and Child Labour* increases the capacity of the Viet Nam General Confederation of Labour to promote gender equality and mainstream women workers' concerns. The ILO has also supported the Government of Viet Nam to formulate a plan of action to promote women's employment, and improve their working conditions and social protection in the context of economic reform.



## **International Organization for Migration (IOM)**

Address Fifth Floor, 43 Tran Xuan Suan, Ha Noi  
Phone (84 4) 971 6911/12  
Fax (84 4) 971 6913  
e-mail [iomhanoi@iom.int](mailto:iomhanoi@iom.int)

IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits both migrants and society. Incorporating gender considerations into the range of its planning and programmes, IOM Viet Nam is also active in several gender-specific projects, notably in the fight against trafficking in women and children.

Continuing a long and close partnership with the Viet Nam Womens Union (VWU), IOM has supported a number of projects designed to facilitate the safe return and effective reintegration of trafficking victims, as well as a national public information campaign to raise awareness of the causes and consequences of trafficking among potential victims and the general public.

IOM continues to be committed to supporting trafficking victims and technical assistance for national agencies that address the various aspects of the issue of trafficking in women and children.

As needs and opportunities arise, IOM will continue to develop new interventions in support of the VWU and others, to counter trafficking in women and children.

## **The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)**

Address Gender Focal Point  
Fourth Floor, 44b Ly Thuong Kiet, Ha Noi  
Phone (84 4) 934 3417  
Fax (84 4) 934 3418  
e-mail [UNAIDS@netnam.org.vn](mailto:UNAIDS@netnam.org.vn)

Women are about four times more likely than men to contract sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV. A gender dimension is applied in the programming of the activities of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).

UNAIDS has documented the awareness of gender and HIV/AIDS through its Best Practice Collection.

Viet Nam is one of several developing countries in the world where UNAIDS and its co-sponsors directly support *Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV/AIDS (PMTCT)*. The purpose of the PMTCT initiative is to provide a comprehensive care package for HIV positive mothers and their children as well as preventive intervention for HIV-negative mothers.

UNAIDS, in collaboration with its co-sponsors and the local private sector, has carried out a study on the need and acceptability of female condoms among women in the Thanh Xuan commune and Dong Da district of Ha Noi. The main target groups are commercial sex workers and women with STIs. In addition, training has been provided for the local women's union and health workers at private clinics.

## United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNODC)

Address	Gender Focal Point 25-29 Phan Boi Chau, Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 942 1495
Fax	(84 4) 942 2267
e-mail	undcpvietnam@un.org.vn

UNODC attempts to mainstream gender into all projects and activities. *The Ky Son project on Socio-Economic Alternative Development for Opium Replacement*, for example, attempts to guarantee equal access by men and women to agricultural extension services and other agricultural activities usually maintained by women in subsistence economies. Women are assisted with market access, product exploration and credit. In addition, women are specific target beneficiaries in the HIV/AIDS and drug abuse projects for high-risk groups. Women also have a special and important role in community-based detoxification and rehabilitation programmes.

UNODC also strives towards equal representation of men and women among project staff and increased representation of women in higher managerial and representative functions.

## United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

Address	Gender Focal Point 25-29 Phan Boi Chau, Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 942 1495
Fax	(84 4) 942 2267
e-mail	registry@undp.org.vn

UNDP builds upon strong global mandates and international agreements focused on gender issues, such as the Beijing Platform of Action, Beijing plus five, Millennium Development Goals, and also incorporates gender-responsive policy analyses, programme design, formulation and implementation, and monitoring and evaluation processes systematically into its development cooperation. UNDP is committed to promoting gender equality within all its projects through a gender mainstreaming approach.

Since 1997, UNDP has been working closely with the National Committee for the Advancement of Women. Technical support has been provided for the formulation of the Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women in Viet Nam by 2005. The project, "Support to the National Machinery for the Advancement of Women to Mainstream Gender in National Policy & Planning", jointly funded by the Royal Netherlands Embassy, aims to increase gender awareness and strengthening gender analysis skills of key actors (line ministries, NCFAW, CFAWs) to promote more gender-sensitive policy formulation and effective implementation.

In Viet Nam, UNDP is the focal UN agency within the regional Inter-Agency Project on Combating Trafficking in Women and Children in the Mekong Sub-Region.

UNDP is an active member of the Gender Action Partnership and fully supports the current work to promote a gender sensitive approach to the implementation of the Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy. UNDP also led the development of the UN gender Focal Point Working Group.

## United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

Address	Gender Focal Point 23 Cao Ba Quat, Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 747 0275/6
Fax	(84 4) 747 0274
e-mail	registry@unesco.org.vn

UNESCO manages the project, *Promotion of Primary Education for Girls and Disadvantaged Ethnic Groups in the Remote Areas*. The project is focusing on literacy education for ethnic minority women and girls, in collaboration with the Research Centre for Ethnic Minority Education, under the National Institute for Educational Sciences Research, and the Ministry of Education and Training Viet Nam. The objective is to compile, develop, experiment and populariz initiatives concerning primary education, especially to meet the learning needs of the girls belonging to the four major ethnic minority groups.

## United Nations Fund for Population (UNFPA)

Address	Gender Focal Point 3/3B Giang Vo Quarter, Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 845 4763 / 823 6632
Fax	(84 4) 823 2822
e-mail	unfpa-fo@unfpa.org.vn

UNFPA is the lead UN agency for implementing the Programme of Action adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo in 1994. Gender equality is the most important cross-cutting issue in the Programme of Action. Furthermore, there is a separate chapter on gender equality, equity and empowerment in the programme, focusing on three areas: empowerment and the status of women, the girl child, and male responsibilities and participation. UNFPA also plays a critical role in carrying out the mandate of the Beijing Conference on Women. UNFPA works to implement all twelve critical areas of the Beijing Platform but have a special focus on women and health. Globally, as well as in Viet Nam, UNFPA works to increase access to reproductive and sexual health services and information for women, men and adolescents; to reduce maternal mortality and morbidity (safe motherhood); to prevent sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS; and to increase male involvement in, and responsibility for, reproductive health.

UNFPA has assisted the Vietnamese Government to improve the reproductive health status of women since its first programme started in 1978, but UNFPA's Fifth (1997-2000) and Sixth Country Programmes are the first to include the guidelines given by the ICPD and Beijing conferences. The approach followed is mainstreaming of gender concerns into all population, reproductive health and advocacy programmes, projects and activities at the central and provincial level. Furthermore, UNFPA funds a specific project with the Viet Nam Women's Union and the Viet Nam Peasants Union on the promotion of gender equality and male participation in Reproductive Health, which is implemented at the central level as well as in selected provinces.

### United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)

Address	Gender Focal Point 60 Nguyen Thai Hoc, Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 845 7871 / 845 6785 / 823 4929 / 823 2697
Fax	(84 4) 823 2055
e-mail	unhcr@netnam.org.vn

Under the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA), UNHCR has repatriated some 109,764 Vietnamese boat people from first asylum countries, of which forty per cent are (returnee) women. UNHCR has been undertaking the mainstreaming of refugee women's needs and concerns through the overall coordination of special programmes for vulnerable individuals, including single mothers. In addition, UNHCR funded a vocational training project implemented by the Viet Nam Women's Union of Hai Phong (which is the most important province in Viet Nam regarding the number of returnees; more than 25% of the total caseload returned to Hai Phong province). The assistance provided through the Women's Union improved the status and living conditions of returnee women.

UNHCR's effective monitoring of returnees through several Vietnamese speaking international staff illustrated that returnee women, like other Vietnamese women, play a very important role in settling their lives and reintegrating their families into the Vietnamese community. They have tried many jobs, some as vendors in the market, workers in factories, tailors and employees at restaurants or hotels, in order to support their families and provide their children with the opportunity to go to school. Upon completion of the Comprehensive Plan of Action by the end of 1997, UNHCR has nearly completed its humanitarian mission in Viet Nam and is slowly phasing down its activities.

### United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Address	Gender Focal Point Tung Shing Square, 2 Ngo Quyen, 15 <sup>th</sup> Floor, Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 935 0028-33
Fax	(84 4) 935 0040
e-mail	hanoi.registry@unicef.org

UNICEF's Gender and Development Programme has assisted the Viet Nam Women's Union's (VWU) efforts since 1993, in implementing an integrated project to support poor rural women. The scheme combines credit and savings for income generation with communication and functional literacy, with the aim of improving community behaviour on health, nutrition and childcare issues. This project has reached about 65,000 poor women in 28 provinces.

UNICEF co-developed a gender analysis training manual in 1996, with VWU and UNDP. In 1998, UNICEF developed a complementary gender training video. Since then, gender analysis and awareness training courses have been organized with these gender training materials for about 1,000 government officers from thirty provinces. Efforts have been made in 1999-2000 to build gender analysis capacity across all UNICEF programmes and projects, including gender training and an internal gender focal point system. From 2001, there will no longer be an independent gender programme, but gender analysis will be integrated into all UNICEF programming, and women's rights will be jointly promoted with children's rights in a new *Rights Promotion* project.

Plans for integrating rights and gender in schools are being discussed with UNICEF support. Orientation/training on rights and gender mainstreaming has been organised for key counterparts such as parliamentarians, police,

prosecutors, judges and other government officials, community leaders, mass organisations and women and children themselves. Three orientation meetings on the new NPA for the advancement of women for 2001-2005 for 200 gender focal points in line ministries and provinces were organised in 2002. A comparative analysis of the existing Vietnamese legislation vis-à-vis CEDEW has been conducted for identifying gaps for improvement. A training package on CEDAW and gender is being developed and preparations for training master trainers of CEDAW/gender are underway. A number of publications on rights and gender has been published for various counterparts at different levels.

### **United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)**

Address	UNIDO 25-29 Phan Boi Chau, Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 942 1495
Fax	(84 4) 942 2484
e-mail	unido@un.org.vn

Gender considerations are an integral part of UNIDO activities. Focus is generally put on three areas of particular relevance to women in industrial development: (i) capacity building and skills development; (ii) support to women entrepreneurs in micro-enterprises; and (iii) appropriate technology for agro-industry. In recent years, UNIDO executed a project in northern Viet Nam that trained women entrepreneurs in the food processing industry, providing them with new skills to improve their businesses. A similar project that expands this training modality is underway in central Viet Nam (2001-2004).

### **United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)**

Address	c/o- Poverty & Social Development Cluster, UNDP 25-29 Phan Boi Chau, Ha Noi or East and Southeast Asia Regional Office: UN Building, 5 <sup>th</sup> Floor, Rajdamnern Nok Avenue Bangkok, Thailand 10200
Phone	Thailand (66 2) 288 2093
Fax	Thailand (66 2) 280 6030
e-mail	unifem-bkk@mozart.inet.co.th

UNIFEM works to promote gender equality between women and men, and to advance the status of women. Globally, UNIFEM activities emphasize the importance of a rights-based approach in programming, and are concentrated in three main areas: women's empowerment in governance and leadership; women's economic empowerment; and the protection of women's human rights. In Viet Nam, a particular focus of UNIFEM has been on strengthening the capacity of women's groups to represent collectively and individually, women's needs and concerns in all planning and policy-making processes.

UNIFEM works with organized civil society groups, Government agencies, and UN and other development agencies to ensure women have both access to, and are empowered enough to claim, their rights. Particularly, UNIFEM works to achieve the elimination of violence against women (VAW) in Viet Nam, promoting a rights-based and gender-responsive perspective in actions to manage and prevent VAW. Efforts to date have concentrated on using UNIFEM's expertise to facilitate local partners to raise community awareness of VAW and to campaign for legal and legislative change in relation to domestic violence. Viet Nam is also part of a global UNIFEM project on gender considerations in combating the spread of HIV/AIDS, and promoting a gender and rights perspective in the management of HIV.

Other UNIFEM work in Viet Nam focuses on women's economic empowerment. To achieve this goal, UNIFEM has assisted in the formation and consolidation of a national women's business council, a first for Viet Nam. Through this initiative local women entrepreneurs now have an official support network able to advocate for their concerns and business interests. A gender perspective has been mainstreamed into this network, emphasizing respect for women's rights as an essential element of corporate social responsibility and good labour practice.

### **United Nations Volunteers (UNV)**

Address	25-29 Phan Boi Chau, Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 942 1495
Fax	(84 4) 942 2267
e-mail	unv@undp.org.vn

The advancement of women is a key element in the work of UNV. UN Volunteers work closely with women to identify and solve problems within their communities and have helped them gain access to necessary technical assistance. UNV has a proactive approach to recruiting women as volunteers, placing great value in their unique contribution to tapping the vast potential of women in communities throughout Viet Nam.

Women are active in both the International and National UNV (NUNV) programme. As of December 2001, 67 UNVs were working in Viet Nam, of which 30 were women.

### **World Health Organization (WHO)**

Address	Gender Focal Point 63 Tran Hung Dao, Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 943 3734-6
Fax	(84 4) 943 3740
e-mail	who@vtn.wpro.who.int

Most WHO-supported projects hinge very significantly on the roles that women are expected to play: safe motherhood; child immunization; safe water; nutrition; etc. Women are contributing, in an ever-increasing way, to health promotion and protection work, particularly in rural, remote and disadvantaged areas. The organization is actively pursuing gender equity in its equal opportunity recruitment procedures.

### **World Bank (WB)**

Address	Gender Focal Point / Ms. Pham Thi Mong Hoa 63 Ly Thai To, Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 934 6600
Fax	(84 4) 934 6597
e-mail	hphaml@worldbank.org

In the view of the World Bank, gender matters on its own merits and because it is linked to the equity, efficiency and sustainability of development—in other words, the quality of development.

While the World Bank does not fund projects in Viet Nam specifically focused on women, gender is increasingly important in its portfolio. On the project side, the aim is to assess and address gender aspects and the impacts of proposed investment projects by undertaking Social Assessments in early project preparation. The Small Grants program gives grants to civil society organizations, including those working on gender issues. The

World Bank systematically includes Vietnamese gender researchers and NGOs in any consultations on its Country Assistance Strategy, World Development Reports, Consultative Group sessions, etc.

In our policy dialogue with the Government of Viet Nam, we have raised among others, issues related to gender and land ownership, domestic violence, and gender inequity within the family. The World Bank participates actively in the Gender Action Partnership, through which gender advocacy and policy issues are addressed in partnership with other donors and the Government.

Gender will continue to be an important focus of the World Bank in Viet Nam. Recent and planned interventions include:

- Jointly with other donors, provided assistance to NCFAW in conducting the situation analysis and preparing the Ten-Year Strategy and the National Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women 2001-2005;

- Jointly with other donors, provided assistance to NCFAW in drafting the Joint Government Donor Gender Framework;

- Provided assistance to NCFAW to establish a task force for providing inputs to the Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy;

- Organized conference to bring together the gender machinery of 6 countries in East Asia to strategize on mainstreaming gender into national poverty reduction strategies;

- Research on gender-based violence and on Equality of Opportunity under Vietnamese law and its implementation;

- Pilot on changing land-use rights certificates to show names of both husband and wife;

- Detailed gender assessment of rural portfolio;

- Training of provincial authorities on mainstreaming gender in the CPRGS at local levels;

- Fund to mainstream gender in to the Bank's program;

- Tackling gender issues in future Poverty Reduction Support Credits.

### **Asian Development Bank (ADB)**

Address	Social Development and Gender Officer Sun Red River Building 7 <sup>th</sup> Floor, 23 Phan Chu Trinh Str., Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 933 1374
Fax	(84 4) 933 1373
e-mail	adbvrm@adb.org

Improving the status of women is included as one of the five strategic development objectives of the Bank, alongside economic growth, poverty reduction, human development — including population planning, and sound management of natural resources and the environment. In June 1998, the Bank adopted a 'Policy on Gender and Development (GAD)'. Mainstreaming is adopted as the key strategy in promoting gender equity. Gender is seen as a crosscutting concern influencing all social, economic and political processes. Under the new policy, gender issues will be mainstreamed into all Bank activities, including macroeconomic and sectoral work, and lending and technical assistance operations. To promote implementation of the GAD Policy, a Bank-wide 'Gender and Development Action Plan' is to be prepared and gender specialists have been recruited for the Resident Missions to assist with the implementation of the policy.

The Bank's Viet Nam Resident Mission has a gender specialist to assist with administering the gender and development aspects of Bank-assisted loans and technical assistance, with a view to mainstreaming gender in selected projects, and providing GAD technical assistance to executing agencies.

The Bank's programme of activities in Viet Nam includes both projects that are targeted specifically to women and projects that mainstream gender issues. Bank financed loans in Viet Nam directly addressing gender concerns include: livelihood improvement in central provinces; population and family health; rural health; water supply; rural infrastructure; forestry sector; vocational and technical education; secondary education; teacher training; and rural finance.

## **Bilateral Donors**

### **Donor Activities in Gender and Development**

As interest in gender and development grows, networking and information exchange among donors becomes more important. The donors listed below, along with the United Nations, have formed the Gender Donor Group, as a network of representatives of organizations involved in gender funding. The group meets every two months to share information and discuss ongoing and upcoming programmes. The meetings are hosted by the member organizations on a revolving basis.

The number of donors in Viet Nam that mainstream gender into their overall programming has been increasing over the past several years. The activities of those most active in gender funding are introduced below.

### **Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID)**

Address	Australian Agency for International Development, Australian Embassy, 8 Dao Tan, Ba Dinh District Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 831 7754
Fax	(84 4) 831 7706
	Gender Contact – Ms Nguyen Thanh Tu - Ext -175
e-mail	Thanh-tu_nguyen@ausaid.gov.au

The Australian Government is strongly committed to the promotion of equal opportunities for women and men as participants and beneficiaries of development. Recognizing this, the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) aims to incorporate a gender perspective in all of its aid activities in Viet Nam. Gender is considered in the development of sectoral and other policies; the development of, and priority setting for, all programmes; and at every step of the AusAID project cycle. Gender mainstreaming is a critical part of AusAID's work in the key priority sectors in Viet Nam: rural development, water supply and sanitation and governance, and in other sectors such as health and HIV/AIDS.

For example:

Women and men are benefiting equally from the provision of clean running water in five provincial towns, and women have participated in the development of the water supply system, the institutional strengthening of the water supply company, and in campaigns to increase awareness of public health and community development.

Women are awarded 50% of the 150 scholarships available each year to study in Australia.

A Primary Health Care Project, which is providing support for basic health care in four provinces, is targeting women and children.

AusAID also provides funding through NGOs and its Small Activities Scheme for projects which aim at empowering women at the national, provincial and district levels, through activities such as capacity building for the Viet Nam Women's Union, credit schemes, health, family planning, AIDS awareness, and food security programmes.

## Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)

Address	Canadian Embassy 31 Hung Vuong, Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 823 5500
Fax	(84 4) 843 5560
e-mail	vu-yen-thi@dfait-maeci.gc.ca

The Canadian Embassy in Ha Noi reflects the Canadian International Development Agency's (CIDA) strong commitment to mainstreaming gender equality in all of its programmes and projects. At present, the CIDA Programme in Viet Nam has two small project funds that are available to Viet Nam-based organizations to support locally defined gender activities. These are the Canada Fund, that is poverty-focused, and the Social and Women's Initiative Fund (SWIF), which focuses on strengthening the role of women in Vietnamese society through support for policy initiatives such as activities related to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

These existing funds are responsive in nature and as such, the Canadian Embassy and CIDA welcome project proposals dealing with gender equality and women in development issues in Viet Nam.

## Government of Denmark (DANIDA)

Address	19 Dien Bien Phu, Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 823 1888
Fax	(84 4) 823 1999
e-mail	hanamb@um.dk.

A major thrust in Danish Development Assistance will be mainstreaming women's interests into the overall development assistance and at all project levels. Gender has become a cross-cutting issue of all projects and programmes supported by DANIDA. During the formulation and implementation of the three focus areas of cooperation between Denmark and Viet Nam (ie. agriculture, fisheries and water resources), the scope of relevance of gender aspects have been taken on board when drawing up all sector support programmes. Gender-specific analyses have been conducted with respect to education and training activities in which new methods, which may impact on traditional gender role division, are recommended. Analyses of categorical female employment areas like, for example, fishing processing and aquaculture, have also been conducted. These analyses have been attentive not to burden women with extra workloads, on top of their already busy daily schedules, without the greatest circumspection. Besides, through the Local Grant Facility, the Embassy has financed several women specific projects such as:

- Seminar on Women Scientists on the Entrance of the Twenty-first Century
- Founding Meeting of the Women in the Fisheries Network in Viet Nam
- Support representatives from the National Committee for the Advancement of Women to Participate in the Second Congress of the Global Network of Women in Politics
- Support to Study Background Paper on Gender and Violence
- Training women candidates for the People's Council Elections 1999

In September 2000, the Swedish Danish Fund for the Promotion of Gender Equality in Viet Nam was established in cooperation with the Swedish Embassy in Ha Noi. The purpose of the Fund is to promote gender equality and the development of civil society in Viet Nam. Priority support will be provided to groups of poor farmers and women who are living in rural, remote, or mountainous areas, channeled through NGOs as well as via individual initiatives. The Fund has a three year time frame (2000-2003) with possible extension.

### Government of Finland

Address	31 Hai Ba Trung, Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 826 6788
Fax	(84 4) 826 6766
e-mail	finnemb@fpt.vn

Finland has been striving towards the full release of women's and men's development opportunities, with special attention paid to disadvantaged women, such as women in ethnic minority groups. Mainstreaming gender into development cooperation has been considered essential in attaining the interconnected main goals of Finnish development cooperation: poverty reduction, environmental sustainability, the promotion of equality, democracy and human rights.

Gender-related activities have been incorporated in projects supported by Finland in Viet Nam, especially in such rural development projects as the *Viet Nam-Finland Forestry Cooperation Programme* in Bac Kan province, the *Quang Tri Rural Development Programme*, the *Thua Thien Hue Rural Development Programme*, and the *Child and Maternal Health Care Project* in Nghe An province. In the *Viet Nam-Finland Forestry Cooperation Programme* in Bac Kan, the lessons learned from the first phase showed a need for more attention to gender issues in general, and to women's participation in training in particular. In the second phase, the Vietnamese Women's Union is actively involved in the implementation of the programme. The programme has, for example, organized training on gender and land issues.

Finland has also supported small-scale projects from which women have benefited either directly or indirectly. An important event, which demonstrates Finnish strategic support to gender equality, is the recently allocated Funds for Local Cooperation, to be disbursed at the discretion of the Embassy. Under this scheme, equality, together with human rights, democracy and governance, are the main criteria for assistance. The first commitment from these funds was made in June 2000, when Finland signed an agreement on financial support to the operations of the Secretariat of MARD Technical Working Group on Gender for eighteen months, starting July 2000.

### Government of Japan

Address	Eleventh Floor, Daeha Business Centre 360 Kim Ma, Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 831 0005 / 831 0008 / 831 5560 / 831 5570
Fax	(84 4) 835 5509
e-mail	jicvietnam@fpt.vn

The Japanese Embassy supports Women and Development (WAD) through the Grant Assistance for Grassroots Projects Scheme in the Mekong Delta and Nghe An Province. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) supports the *Reproductive Health Project* in Nghe An Province in collaboration with the Japanese Organization for International Cooperation in Family Planning (JOICFP). Phase One of the project (June 1997-May 2000) helped to improve the reproductive health of women in 244 communes in eight of the nineteen districts of Nghe An. Phase Two started in September 2000, with a duration of five years and will cover 467 communes in the remaining districts and towns in the province.

## Government of the Netherlands

Address	6 <sup>th</sup> Floor, Daeha Office Tower, 360 Kim Ma, Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 8 315 650
Fax	(84 4) 8 315 655
e-mail	han-os@minbuza.nl

Since 1993, the Netherlands has provided support to a number of organizations aiming to improve women's participation in decision making, to raise gender awareness and to support reproductive health care. The Viet Nam Women's Union is an important partner and often play a crucial role in project implementation. Several post-Beijing activities receive funding, including support given to the UNDP/NCFW project to develop capacity for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. In addition, the Netherlands' cooperation concentrates on improving the nutritional status of women and children and on strengthening primary health care as part of the health sector. Through the Local Women's Fund, small-scale assistance is provided for research, training and local initiatives relating to gender issues.

## Government of Belgium

Address	49 Hai Ba Trung, Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 934 6177/8
Fax	(84 4) 934 6184
e-mail	BADC@hn.vnn.vn

In the bilateral cooperation programme, the Belgian Government and the Viet Nam Women's Union agreed in 1997 on a project focused on the strengthening of the institutional capacity of the Viet Nam Women's Union to manage savings and credit programmes for rural poor women. The Vietnamese-Belgian Credit Project (VBCP) aims to establish a sustainable financial credit management system by strengthening the capacity of the VWU in providing access to efficient and sustainable savings and credit services to the poor and disadvantaged rural women in Viet Nam. The VBCP is a micro-finance institution that provides financial (credit and savings) and non-financial services (business advice) to poor rural women. The Belgian government also funded the UNIDO project "Development of Women Entrepreneurship in Central Viet Nam (Da Nang)".

## Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC)

Address	Melia Central Office Building, 16 <sup>th</sup> Floor 44B Ly Thuong Kiet street, Ha Noi, Viet Nam
Phone	(84 4) 934 66 27
Fax	(84 4) 934 66 33
e-mail	hanoi@sdc.net

Gender equality is defined as the freedom of an individual to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by gender roles. It supposes the equal enjoyment by women and men of socially valued goods, opportunities, resources, and rewards. The aim is not that women and men become the same, but that their opportunities and life chances become and remain equal. (SDC Gender in Practice - An operational kit for SDC and its Partners)

To mainstream gender is an overall strategy followed by SDC to achieve gender equality and to ensure that the work of SDC and its partners does not perpetuate inequalities. Mainstreaming gender implies changes in SDC development aims, approaches and organisational culture so that they can meet women and men's respective needs and bring them equal benefits.

SDC Mekong Regional Coordination Office (COOF) commits to mainstream gender equality in order to assist Viet Nam in:

Promoting both men and women to have equal social, economic and political status, according to their rights, capacities and competencies,

Utilising the full capacity of the community, mobilise its population's competence, life skills, experience, knowledge and resources,

Achieving the objectives as outlined in Viet Nam's National Plan of Action for Women (POA 2) and the Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (CPRGS) in relation to gender-balanced development.

Besides concrete support provided to the Vietnam Central Women Union and the Gender Technical Working Group of MARD, SDC also supports its projects in the country and region to mainstream gender equality in to the development projects. Mainstreaming activities may include:

1. Contributing to gender awareness within SDC programmes and projects through training, workshops, presentations and visits
2. Advocating for commitment and cooperation between donors, sectors, projects and with partners on issues and activities related to gender,
3. Encouraging sharing and capitalising of gender mainstreaming experiences and practices,
4. Providing support and advice to projects and partners of SDC on gender related issues and mainstreaming activities,
5. Allocating appropriate resources to support the mainstreaming of gender mainstreaming into SDC supported projects and programs,
6. Ensuring projects contribute to the achievement of the POA 2 and CPRGS's objectives on gender equality.

### **Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)**

Address	2 Nui Truc, Van Phuc, Ha Noi
Phone	(844) 845 4824 / 845 4825 // 823 5853 / 823 5854
Fax	(84 4) 823 2195
e-mail	mrs.hang@sida.se

In bilateral cooperation it is SIDA's policy to ensure that gender equality should be integrated in all activities. In large programmes such as the rural development and health sector, one person in the consultancy company is usually in charge of ensuring the mainstreaming of gender aspects.

Special support to promote gender equality an women's rights is provided through:

- 1) Projects implemented by the Viet Nam Women's Union
  - Institutional Development to support VWU with training courses in order to increase capacity for female staff at the central and local levels.
  - Research, Studies and Workshops on gender equality, women's rights, and women's leadership in politics.
  - Increasing women's economic rights by setting up numbers of vocational training centres at provincial levels.
  - Publications and communication.

Swedish support through VWU since 1996 has been evaluated in 2000, and continued support is under consideration.

- 2) A Swedish gender fund was set up in 1997, with the aim of supporting grass roots initiatives promoting gender equality and civil society. The fund has so far supported many small scale initiatives including different kinds of training, research, community events and small libraries. From September 2000, the fund will be run with joint support from Sweden and Denmark.

# National Organizations with Initiatives on Gender Equality and Women's Issues

## Center for Family and Women Studies (CEFAWS)

Postal address	6 Dinh Cong Trang Street, Hoan Kiem district, Ha Noi, Viet Nam
Telephone:	(84 4) 933 0435; 933 2890; 933 1744
Hand phone:	(84-0) 913-21-41-55 (Director)
Fax:	(84-4) 933-2890
e-mail:	cfws@netnam.vn; thgiang@fpt.vn
Website:	<a href="http://www.vngender.edu.vn">http://www.vngender.edu.vn</a>

The Center for Family and Women Studies (CEFAWS) is a national organization involved in family and gender issues in Viet Nam. CEFAWS was founded in 1987 by the Vietnamese Government as the first leading research institution specializing in family and gender issues. The main activities of CEFAWS include research related to Women, Family, and Gender, and conducting seminars, workshops, advocacy and interventions to achieve greater gender equality and equity. The function of CEFAWS is to provide the Government with the scientific foundations for policy-making process concerning women, family and gender.

**CEFAWS's main goals** are to furnish policy-makers and people with basic scientific knowledge of women and family through CEFAWS's studies, serving the struggle for women's advancement, gender equality and equity; and to raise on behalf of women their rights and benefits through CEFAWS' interventions and advocacy activities such as providing support directly to ethnic, disadvantaged women and their families as well as holding workshops or seminars, opening public training courses to raise awareness on gender equality, publishing research products, printing and disseminating leaflets on women's rights, gender equality and equity.

CEFAWS's Information Channels are:

- Bimonthly Journal "**Women's Studies**" (in Vietnamese, with summaries in English)
- Semi-annual Journal "**Family and Women Studies**" (in English)
- Bimonthly Newsletter "**Research and Training on Gender**" (in Vietnamese)
- Website "**Gender**" (in Vietnamese and English): <http://www.vngender.edu.vn>
- A library specialized in gender, women, and family studies with over 4,000 book titles, over 2,000 special unpublished material volumes, over 1,000 journal volumes, 60 journal titles, and many other publications of CEFAWS.

CEFAWS's Activities include:

- Opening numerous training courses on gender equality and equity
- Conducting research on gender, women and family
- Undertaking consultancies for women-concerned organizations
- Disseminating information on gender equality, women's rights, etc through various kinds of publications and website
- Carrying out intervention activities on women's rights and benefits
- Carrying out advocacy for gender equality and gender equity

## Centre for Education Promotion and Empowerment for Women (CEPEW)

Address	113 DI Trung Tu, Dong Da, Ha Noi
Phone/Fax	(84 4) 572 6789
e-mail	cepow@fmail.vnn.vn

Established in 1997, the Centre for Education Promotion and Empowerment for Women seeks to empower women to achieve gender equality and enhance women's status at home and in the family. Its main tasks include capacity building, developing and disseminating learning resources for women, and implementing



community based projects to improve the women's quality of life. CEPEW carries out research work in the areas of girls' education , and women's leadership and decision making at all levels. The training programmes conducted by the centre include men and women local leaders in gender issues, vocational training for poor women in local areas, and small business skills training for rural women. The centre also conducts community-based development programmes on:

- income generation and health care for women,
- improving women's skills in the household economy,
- creating vocational training for women,
- prevention of violence against women in grassroots communities,
- establishing a club on "women and life", to create opportunities for women to share knowledge, skills and experiences in their lives.
- gender and the implementation of Grassroots Democracy Decree

### **The Centre for Reproductive and Family Health (RAFH)**

Address C 12 Bai Cat Linh Dong Da, Ha Noi  
Phone (84 4) 823 4288  
Fax (84 4) 823 4288  
e-mail rafh@bdvn.vnmail.vdn.net

RAFH was established in 1993 and operates as an NGO with a licence from the Department of Technology, Science and Environment. The main activities of the centre focus in research on reproductive tract infections, sexually transmitted diseases, health and sexual education. It is also involved in counselling on family planning and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and mobilising men to participate in family planning. RAFH runs training of trainer courses for health staff, midwives, nurses, community health workers and family planning counsellors.

### **Centre for Research on Female Labour MOLISA**

Address 2 Dinh Le St, Ha Noi  
Phone (84 4) 826 9732 , mobile. 0903221002  
Fax (84 4) 826 9733  
e-mail rcf1@fpt.vn

The Centre for Research on Female Labour was established in 1994 as a part of the Institute of Labour Science and Social Affairs (ILSSA) in the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA). The centre has published several books on sex disaggregated data in the area of women and labour in Viet Nam and has conducted research into female labour issues including working conditions, salaries, work standards and social insurance. The Centre has become the main source for information collection and dissemination on information about female workers.

### **Center for Women's Studies, Viet Nam National University, Ha Noi**

Address 144, Xuan Thuy, Cau Giay, Ha Noi  
Phone (84 4) 7680471  
Fax (84 4) 7680429  
e-mail qui@vnu.edu.vn

The Centre for Women's Studies was established to develop the women's potential and participation in study and development. The Centre conducts research and projects in a variety of issues related to women, particularly

in the scientific sector. The training section offers courses in the history of Vietnamese and world women's movements, family culture, Vietnamese women's health, population and family planning, the impacts of law and social policies on women and children, the roles of women in the community, and gender and development.

### **Institute of Sociology**

Address	27 Tran Xuan Soan, Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 9784630
Fax	(84 4) 9784631
e-mail	luantd@hn.vnn.vn vn-ios@hn.vnn.vn

The Institute of Sociology (IOS) was established in 1983 as a specialized research unit of the National Center for Social Sciences and Humanities of Viet Nam. Its major functions are:

- Research on social issues, both theoretical and empirical in order to provide scientific foundation for formulation of national policy on socio-economic development
- Post-graduate and Ph.D. training in sociology
- Consultancy services for development project

The Institute of Sociology is leading social research institution in Viet Nam. IOS has 52 researchers including seven professors and associate professors, nineteen Ph.D. graduates and twenty MBA recipients working in eight research departments. Most senior researchers were trained abroad.

The current major research focus of IOS is *social and cultural changes during the process of industrialisation and modernisation in Viet Nam*. The research areas include:

- Theoretical issues regarding the modernization process of the Vietnamese society
- Changes in social structure and social stratification in a transitional society
- Sociology of economic life and human resources
- Population dynamics and policies
- Health and the health-care system
- Family transformation under the impact of industrialization and modernization and gender relations
- Changes in social welfare system
- Public opinion and the mass media
- Sociology of daily life and socio-cultural changes

### **Research Center for Gender, Family and Environment in Development (CGFED)**

Address:	19 - A26, Lane 347, Hoang Quoc Viet Rd, Nghia Tan, Cau Giay, Ha Noi, Viet Nam
Phone:	(84 4) 756 5929
Fax:	(84 4) 756 5874
e-mail:	cgfed@hn.vnn.vn

CGFED is established in May, 1993. As an independent research Centre, its function is to study gender, family and environment issues in Viet Nam from the perspective of human development, with an interdisciplinary profile. The Centre is a non-profit and non-governmental organisation operated by voluntary scholars and researchers of various disciplines.

Activities of the Centre include:

Conducting fundamental research on problems of Gender, Family and both social and natural Environments in Development perspective, and the interaction of these problems, applying inter-disciplinary method. The target groups of the research are women and men at all ages.

Applying technological and theoretical results and advances of scientific research to problems of Gender, Family and Environment for the service of national development, and involvement in strategies for socio-economic and cultural development and environmental improvement.

Organising workshops, seminars and training courses at different levels for various groups of participants, especially for people at local communities.

Collecting and disseminating information on issues related to gender, reproductive health and rights, family and environment.

### **Centre for Gender, Environment and Sustainable Development (GENDCEN)**

Address	202 B5 Vinh Ho, Dong Da, Ha Noi, Vietnam		
Phone	(84 4) 853 3860	Fax	(84 4)563 6486
e-mail	que@hn.vnn.vn; gendcen@hn.vnn.vn		

GENDCEN is a non-profit and non-governmental institution under the Viet Nam Economic Association. It was established in January 1998. GENDCEN is a network of professionals from various disciplines such as economics, agro-forestry, sociology and engineering. It conducts research and analysis and provides consultancies in areas such as: (i) the impact of economic reforms and the transition to a market economy on different social groups including changing gender relations; (ii) the impact of socio-economic factors on the environment including forestry, coastal areas and land allocation; and (iii) poverty analysis and income and job creation for vulnerable groups.

### **Towards Ethnic Women (TEW)**

Address	A4, Lang Khoa Hoc, Ngoc Khanh, Ha Noi		
Phone	(84 4) 771 5690 or 771 6386		
Fax	(84 4) 771 5691	e-mail	chesh@tew-chesh.org.vn

TEW was founded in 1994 and has permit to act as an NGO through the Association of Science and Technology, and the Ethnology Association. The organization runs small scale projects with ethnic minority women in the areas of health care, traditional medicine, agriculture, environment, natural resources, education, water supply, infrastructure and traditional handicrafts.

### **Center for Social Development Studies**

Address	67 Truc Bach, Ha Noi		
Phone	(84 4) 716-2918/19;	Fax	(84 4) 716-2917
e-mail	csds@netnam.vn	website	www.csdsvn.org

The Center for Social Development Studies (CSDS) is a non-profit and non-government organization under the Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Associations. The mission of CSDS is to contribute to the socioeconomic development of Vietnam through activities in research, training, and consultancy on the country's key social issues. Its main objectives are to conduct research, training, and consultancies on social development issues of Vietnam; to establish a database on social development issues and disseminate information for academic and advocacy purposes; and to link with universities, research institutes, and NGOs in and outside Vietnam to undertake social development projects. Key areas of activity include research, training, and advocacy on gender and sexuality, health and social development. CSDS also hosts a Resource Center on Gender, Sexuality and Reproductive Health.

# NGOs with Initiatives on Gender Equality and Women's Issues

## VUFO-NGO Resource Centre Viet Nam

Address	La Thanh Hotel 218 Doi Can, Ha Noi, Viet Nam
Phone	(84 4) 832-8570
Fax	(84 4) 832-8611
General e-mail	info@ngocentre.netnam.vn
Website	http://www.ngocentre.netnam.vn

The NGO Resource Centre can provide information on NGOs active in Viet Nam. The Resource Centre publishes an NGO directory on an annual basis. This directory lists NGO activities by sector, including gender, children, income generation, micro-finance, education, nutrition, health, reproductive health, and culture.

## The Asia Foundation

Address	#10-03, Prime Centre 53 Quang Trung Street, Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 943-3263
Fax	(84 4) 943-3257
e-mail	general@taf.vnn.vn

The Asia Foundation supports exchanges and dialogues, technical assistance, institutional development, and research in four broad program areas: governance and law, economic reform and development, women's participation, and international relations. With respect to women's participation in Vietnam, the Foundation supports programs designed to increase economic opportunities for women, combat trafficking, and promote women's awareness of their legal rights. In 2001, the Foundation developed a pilot micro-enterprise project in Nam Dinh in partnership with CEPEW. This micro-enterprise model, which supports leadership training, credit and savings for women, is being expanded to other provinces to help create economic opportunities for women. In addition, with USAID support and in cooperation with the Vietnam Women's Union and CEPEW, the Foundation recently launched a two-year project to prevent and deter trafficking in women and children in Vietnam through innovative program interventions and facilitation of bilateral and regional coordination. Finally, the Foundation is partnering with the Vietnam General Confederation of Labor to assess women's awareness of labor law and strengthen enforcement of the Labor Code. The Foundation is working with the labor federations of Ho Chi Minh City and Binh Duong Province to provide training and education to female workers in textile and footwear industries on their legal labor rights.

## CARE International in Viet Nam

Ha Noi		Ho Chi Minh City	
Address:	25 Hang Bun Street Ba Dinh District, Ha Noi	Address:	91/35-37 Su Van Hanh (Noi Dai) Street District 10, HCMC
Phone:	(84 4) 716-1930	Phone:	(84 8) 862-9459
Fax:	(84 4) 716-1935	Fax:	(84 4) 862 6056
e-mail:	carevn@care.org.vn	e-mail:	carehcm@hcm.vnn.vn

CARE International recognizes gender awareness as one of eight basic requirements in its international programming philosophy. In Viet Nam, CARE conducts gender training for its own staff and those of its partners. With the support of the Royal Netherlands Embassy CARE has produced a gender training package in Vietnamese. CARE's programmes take men's and women's role into consideration throughout the project life



cycle, beginning from needs assessment and analysis to monitoring and final evaluation. In partnership with AusAID, CARE has implemented women's assertiveness training and Information Education and Communication programs for couples so women may negotiate condom use with their husbands and protect themselves from HIV/AIDS. Similarly understanding and increasing men's role in sexual and reproductive health programs to promote healthy sexual development experiences for men and women was key to CARE's "men-in-the-know project". CARE also ensures that women are empowered to improve their economic position relative to men through micro-finance and micro-enterprise schemes. Raising gender considerations within policy dialogue on matters such as land allocation and natural resource management, HIV/AIDS prevention, family planning and distribution of emergency relief in times of disaster are all part of CARE's efforts to promote gender equity. Organizational research and learning in relation to gender and diversity is also key to CARE's mission and programming in Viet Nam.

### **Catholic Relief Services**

Address	Room 342, Binh Minh Hotel, 27 Ly Thai To
Phone	(84 4) 9346916
Fax	(84 4) 9346920
e-mail	crs@srs.org.vn

Catholic Relief Services' promotes right relationships among all people by ensuring that men and women have an equal opportunity to realize their full human potential. CRS Viet Nam programs apply gender programming principles: 1) All programmes identify gender disparities in needs and opportunities. ARED (Agriculture and Rural Enterprise Development) programme also carries out a gender analysis and collects gender disaggregated data for programming and monitoring purposes; 2) Programmes promote equal rights, participation and control. All CRS projects encourage active participation of both women and men in all stages of project design and implementation. To do this, programme staff is trained on gender issues. ARED programme specifically addresses gender equality in access to information and services and uses monitoring system that examines and measures changes in women's and men's lives. Past microfinance projects have targeted women as participants in microfinance schemes. Emergency programme has raised gender considerations in distribution of emergency relief in times of diasaster; 3) Programs strengthen right relationships in partnership with local people and organizations. ARED program aims to strengthen commitment to and capacity in gender issues, e.g. by organizing seminars and trainings on gender to village, commune and district level key beneficiaries and partners.

### **Cooperation Internationale pour le Developement et la Solidarite (CIDSE)**

Address	6, Duong so 4, Khu A, Nam Thanh Cong, Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 8359956, 8359956
Fax	(84 4) 8359928
e-mail	cidsehan@netnam.org.vn

CIDSE is a working group of thirteen Catholic development member organizations from Europe, North America and New Zealand, that has been active in Viet Nam since 1977. CIDSE is committed to promoting Gender Equity and Empowerment within its programme. One staff person has been assigned to the responsibility of advancing those concerns within the organization. In 1997, 1999 and 2002, training and refresher training on Gender Awareness and Analysis was conducted for CIDSE staff in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. In the organization, the programme manual is in the stage of being developed and will be implemented that takes gender concerns into consideration. CIDSE funds have been made available to ensure that gender equity is mainstreamed throughout CIDSE development projects, especially in newly developed projects so as to improve the conditions and positions of women in project areas. In addition to gender training for project partners' staff as an important activity, a number of genders assessment studies were conducted in 1999 and 2000 to analyse the

gender situation in project. An annual gender audit was conducted in 2001. The outcomes of this gender audit has been taken into consideration for improving gender mainstreaming process within CIDSE programme.

### **The Ford Foundation**

Address	Suites 1502-1503-1504 15th Floor, Vietcombank Tower 198 Tran Quang Khai, Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 934 9766
Fax	(84 4) 934 9765
e-mail	Ford-Hanoi@fordfound.org

The Ford Foundation is a private, international donor organization and a non-governmental organization represented on the Gender Donor Group and on the Joint Government-Donor Gender Strategy Group.

The Foundation provides funding to a number of women's institutions, such as the Centre for Family and Women's Studies and the Women's Studies Department of Ho Chi Minh City Open University, for research, training and exchanges. The organization has recently funded research for and writing of the health chapter of the gender situation analysis, two representatives from NCFAW and VWU to attend the Preparatory Committee for the Beijing+5 conference in New York in March 2000, and 24 official and NGO delegates from Viet Nam to attend the Beijing+5 conference itself, in New York, in June 2000.

### **Friedrich Ebert Stiftung**

Address	7 Ba Huyen Thanh Quan, Ba dinh, Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 8452632 / 845 5108
Fax	(84 4) 845 2631
e-mail	fesvn@netnam.org.vn

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung is a German foundation, based in Bonn and Berlin, Germany, with approximately seventy project and representative offices worldwide and committed to the basic values of social democracy. The representation office in Ha Noi, established in 1990, has been cooperating closely with Vietnamese partner organizations, such as NPA, MOLISA, VGCL, and others.

The foundation's gender activities focus in two areas:

- promoting gender equality in the various processes of decision making, both in politics and social activities within society
- the treatment of gender issues in the working environment.

### **Oxfam Great Britain**

Address	218 Doi Can, La Thanh Hotel, Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 832 5491/2
Fax	(84 4) 832 5247
e-mail	ogb-vietnam@oxfam.org.uk; lkdung@oxfam.org.uk; mwoodhouse@oxfam.org.uk

Oxfam Great Britain mainstreams gender equality issues into all its humanitarian and development programmes in Viet Nam. In addition, it focuses on networking and advocacy on gender equality issues, through coordinating the

Gender Action Partnership, supporting research on gender and development, and providing small scale funding for innovative projects related to operationalizing and learning on processes and strategies needed to achieve gender equality in Viet Nam.

### **Oxfam Hong Kong**

Address	218 Doi Can, La Thanh Hotel, Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 832 8076
Fax	(84 4) 832 8134
e-mail	oxfamhk@oxfamhk.netnam.vn

Established in 1976, Oxfam Hong Kong (OHK) is a non-governmental organization based in and supported by the people of Hong Kong. It has development programmes in fourteen countries and regions in Asia and Africa. OHK opened its office in Ha Noi in 1993, but it has supported development projects since 1988. OHK has an agency-wide gender policy and aims to work towards gender equity by promoting gender fair access to and control over resources at all levels. In Viet Nam, OHK targets ethnic minorities and women as they are among the poorest and most marginalized. Oxfam HK occasionally works with women directly and has built partnerships with, for example, local Women's Union representatives in the six districts where it concentrates its community development work. OHK encourages the participation of women in community decision making and incorporates gender awareness and gender fairness in capacity building programmes of staff, partners and project beneficiaries.

### **Population and Development International (PDI)**

Address	7th floor, Lo Duc, Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 978 2 514/15
Fax	(84 4) 978 2 506
e-mail	pdihaanoi@fpt.vn

PDI has been working with gender issues since the very inception of its work in Viet Nam. PDI's approach to gender is encapsulated in its community development strategies to strengthen women's access to reproductive health and nutrition, and to improve women's economic opportunity. Our principal partners are the Viet Nam Women's Union and the Viet Nam Youth Union. Our project's contribution to gender equality are found in advocacy efforts, and IEC materials for women and youth groups. In collaboration with JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. PDI has completed and published a qualitative research on impact of Cairo program of action on gender, women's empowerment and reproductive health in two Vietnamese communities. At present PDI is doing another qualitative research on the links between gender and sexuality and reproductive health in Viet Nam as a follow up of the previous research.

### **Radda Barnen**

Address	6 Ton That Thiep, Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 823 2393 or 823 4112
Fax	(84 4) 823 2394
e-mail	rbhanoi@netnam.org.vn

Save the Children Sweden (Radda Barnen) has produced a reference kit as a guide and a tool on how to integrate child-focused gender equality perspectives into practical work. The kit also promotes discussion and provides



information for policy dialogue and advocacy work as well as mainstreaming gender into institutional development. The focus of the kit is on boys and girls and can serve a wider audience than already child-focused organizations. There are already a number of development organizations that have begun to plan on how to mainstream gender into existing programmes.

Save the Children Sweden will more actively promote gender in the next two year programme with support staff hired to focus on child participation and gender.

### **Save the Children (UK)**

Address	218 Doi Can, Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 832 5319/ 832 5344
Fax	(84 4) 832 5073
e-mail	scuk@scuk.org.vn

Gender is a cross-cutting issue for all SC-UK's work in Viet Nam. All research, project and advocacy work pays attention to gender issues. This starts by disaggregating data by age to understand the differences between men and women, boys and girls. These principles are then applied in the following projects:

*The Microfinance Project* has reached more than 17, 000 women in assisting them to increase their household income and increase the health, nutrition and education levels of their children.

Research on rural and urban child labour issues in Viet Nam has clarified the types of work boys and girls do at different ages and the impact of child labour on children.

*The Ethnic Minority Education Project* aims to improve access to, and relevance and quality of primary and pre-school education for boys and girls.

*The HIV/AIDS Project* aims to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS and sex and sexuality to promote behaviour change so that boys and girls may protect themselves. Sex education materials have recently been designed for ages 6-18 that are targeted to either boys or girls.

*The Disability Project* promotes access to mainstream services for disabled children and their families, fights discrimination and stigmatisation of disabled people and promotes self-advocacy by disabled people. SC-UK jointly commissioned a study into the Trafficking of Humans within and from Viet Nam that focuses on women and children.

### **SNV Viet Nam – Netherlands Development Organization**

Address	108-112 D1 Van Phuc, Kim Ma, Ha Noi
Phone	04 8463791
Fax	04 8463794
e-mail	snvvn@snv.org.vn

SNV Viet Nam aims to strengthen the capacity of Vietnamese organizations to improve the living conditions and the position of poorer sections of Vietnamese society, operating in the Natural Resource Management and Income and Employment Generation sector. SNV Viet Nam works towards mainstreaming gender in its organization, projects and programmes. The focus hereby is on cooperatively addressing gender equality with our partner organisations, capacity building and networking activities in Viet Nam and Asia region.

# Gender Action Partnership

## **Purpose**

In recognition of the critical role of gender equality to poverty reduction and sustainable development, the Gender Action Partnership (GAP) aspires to provide strategic and catalytic support for efforts towards gender equality in Viet Nam. The GAP will promote and actively encourage two-way efforts to support and influence dialogue and policy review and development on gender issues between partners and government, and within government. The GAP's efforts will be guided by a strategic and responsive forward work-programme and supported by targeted working groups focusing on significant specific issues such as Public Finance Reform and the CPRGS.

## **Working Arrangements**

### **Membership**

GAP is an inclusive partnership that aims to involve representatives of all key government, non-government, bilateral, multilateral and United Nations agencies that play a role in Viet Nam's development. Where there maybe many members of a group - such as the International NGOs - it is recommended that a number of representatives be nominated to attend GAP meetings and represent their group's interests and experiences and report back to the group on GAP initiatives. NCFAW will play this role on behalf of the various Committees for the Advancement of Women within Government.

### **GAP Coordination Group**

GAP efforts are coordinated by a small working group of members who ideally represent key development agency groups (Government, NGO, INGO, bilateral, multilateral). The coordination group oversees GAP's efforts and assists in maintaining the momentum of the group's work. The coordination group might generate ideas for meetings, forums, arrange guest speakers, and carry out background work on an issue.

### **Frequency of Meetings**

Meetings are held approximately every 2 months, with the provision to meet more often if necessary.

### **Structure of Meetings**

Meetings usually commence at 11.00am for formal business. The formal part of the meeting is followed by lunch as an opportunity for informal discussion and networking.

### **Management of Meetings**

The management of meetings is rotated amongst member organisations. A forward meeting plan (6-12 months in advance) which includes themes/issues for discussion and/or action, is developed where members nominate when they will take responsibility for managing the meetings.

### **Host Agency Responsibilities**

- Organize the venue
- Organize lunch (approximate cost VND2 million)
- Facilitate the meeting
- Write up a record of the meeting
- Translate the record into Vietnamese
- Provide Vietnamese and English versions of the meeting record to GAP Secretariat in sufficient time for the record and agenda to be distributed to members prior to next meeting

The format of the meeting record should be a brief record of issues covered and decisions taken in the meeting - with the focus of the record on the production of thematic information note arising from the topic of meeting. The thematic information note should be a summary of key points on the issue of discussion, that recipients can use as a resource and distribute to colleagues if needed.

#### ***GAP Secretariat Support - NCFAW***

The National Committee for the Advancement of Women, as the key government agency responsible for the provision of advice to Government on gender equality in national policy and planning, will manage the GAP membership email database. In conjunction with the hosting agency the GAP Secretariat will circulate meeting records and agendas.

#### ***GAP Plans and Vision***

The GAP will spend the remainder of 2002 consolidating its new approach to supporting gender equality efforts in Viet Nam. In the first half of 2003 the GAP will review its efforts, and its capacity to expand activities. The Partnership will consider if there is sufficient demand, interest, and resources to enable it to commence new initiatives to build on its efforts; such as organising annual/biannual Gender Forums, the production of GAP Information Brochure, and the coordination of a Gender Information E-Sheet.

#### **GAP Secretariat Contact Details**

	National Committee for the Advancement of Women
Address	39 Hang Chuoi St, Ha Noi
Phone	(84 4) 971 1349
Fax	(84 4) 971 1348
e-mail	ncfaw@hn.vnn.vn