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## **WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF VIET NAM - THE WAY FORWARD**





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## Acknowledgement

This report was written with the support of the Cambridge-Viet Nam Women's Leadership Programme: Empowerment of Women in the Public Sector in the Context of International Economic Integration (EOWP) with funding from UNDP. The research was conducted and report written by independent consultants Anita Vandenbeld and Hà Hoa Lý.

Appreciation is given to all interviewees who provided their valuable time for this research. A full list is included in Annex 2. The development of this report was led by Jean Munro of UNDP in collaboration with expertise from Frank Feulner, Bùi Phương Trà, and Trần Mỹ Hạnh of UNDP, Vũ Phương Ly of UN Women, Nguyễn Minh Hằng of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lương Thu Hiền of Ho Chi Minh Academy and Tôn Nữ Thị Ninh of Trí Việt Center for Social and Education Research. Logistical support to conduct the research was provided by EOWP staff Phạm Phương Thảo.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations, including UNDP, or the UN Member States.

## Acronyms

<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
<b>EOWP</b>	Cambridge-Viet Nam Women's Leadership Programme: Empowerment of Women in the Public Sector in the Context of International Economic Integration
<b>FF</b>	Viet Nam Fatherland Front
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>MDG</b>	Millennium Development Goals
<b>MOHA</b>	Viet Nam Ministry of Home Affairs
<b>MOLISA</b>	Viet Nam Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs
<b>MP</b>	Member of Parliament (National Assembly)
<b>NA</b>	National Assembly (Parliament)
<b>NCFAW</b>	National Committee for the Advancement of Women
<b>NGO</b>	Non Governmental Organization
<b>SCNA</b>	Standing Committee of the National Assembly
<b>VWU</b>	Viet Nam Women's Union
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme

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## Executive Summary

Viet Nam has always placed a strong emphasis on gender equality. This has resulted in important achievements such as low maternal mortality and high access to education. Indeed, Vietnamese women have one of the highest labour force participation rates in the world. On most gender indicators Viet Nam compares positively in international rankings, especially compared to other countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

Despite the fact that Viet Nam has achieved *middle-income* status and is in the process of modernization, the number of women represented in the National Assembly has been declining over the past ten years. In 1997, Viet Nam ranked among the top ten countries in the world with regard to the number of women in Parliament. By 2012, Viet Nam has fallen to 44th in the world at 24.4%. However, there remains a strong base for women's leadership in Viet Nam, including the fact that Viet Nam is a signatory to the main international treaties on gender equality, it has a strong domestic legal framework, a nation-wide mass organization dedicated to gender equality (the Viet Nam Women's Union) and there has been a slight increase in the number of female representatives elected at the provincial and local levels of government. Viet Nam has seen fluctuations in the number of female parliamentarians in the past, usually around periods of economic and social transformations. Globally, where women's leadership in politics is strong there is a corresponding increase in meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). If the current decline in the number of women in parliament and leadership in Viet Nam continues, the country could be in danger of stagnating in its socio-economic development.

Despite strong legal and policy guidelines, Viet Nam has not reached its own targets on the number of women elected. This study, based largely on interviews with current and former female Members of Parliament and representatives of the Viet Nam Women's Union, the Fatherland Front, government officials and social organizations, indicates that there are a number of ways that the process could be improved to increase the number of women who are successful in elections. According to Viet Nam's political system, there is a strong reliance on "structure" (cơ cấu) in the electoral process. Decisions are made at the highest levels regarding which societal groups need to be represented in the National Assembly, and this "structure" is sent to provincial authorities, who strive to find electoral candidates who can best represent these important social sectors.

The recommendations include areas where there are already fewer women, such as senior officials from the local government, state enterprises, trade unions, the police and military and other social sectors. Therefore, even though there is a target of 30-35% women, most local authorities have difficulty finding enough women who match the criteria. As a result, the few "open" spots are filled with individuals who fall into several "quota" groups at the same time – for instance a young, female ethnic minority.

At the beginning of the process, the Viet Nam Women's Union proposes between 45-50% women as candidates. However in 2011, once all interests and "structure" was applied, the number of female candidates was only 37%. This is partly because over one third of the electoral candidates are nominated by the central level, and consist of incumbent MPs and senior officials, where women are



*Standing Committee at the first meeting of the National Assembly, term XIII*



*Voting at the first meeting of the National Assembly*

significantly under-represented. There are also very few self-nominated candidates who are successful in elections. In this environment, the relative placement of women on the ballot is extremely important. If women are positioned alongside men who are equally or more qualified, usually the man will be elected. This is also a result of patriarchal attitudes in society and within families. As a result, only 24.4% of the successful candidates in the last election were women.

The main recommendations in the report include: increasing awareness of the benefits of electing women; enhancing accountability and oversight mechanisms to ensure implementation of the national gender policies; promoting more women to senior positions, from which electoral candidates are drawn and ending official age discrimination for women. There is also a list of suggestions drawn from the interviews and listed thematically that can be easily implemented. These include ways to improve the pool of qualified candidates by reducing societal stereotypes, promoting more women to senior positions and eliminating barriers to women's advancement. In addition, there are suggestions about how to enhance women's capacity to run effective election campaigns and to position women more strategically on the ballot. The annex includes specific suggestions for the various organizations involved in the electoral process, including the Communist Party, the Viet Nam Women's Union, the Fatherland Front, Government Ministries and other actors. Together, implementation of the recommendations and suggestions would have an immediate effect of reversing the current downward trend and ensuring that Viet Nam emerges once again as a global leader on women's leadership and representation.



## 1. Introduction

The Government of Viet Nam has referred to the current era as a period of *accelerating industrialization and modernization of the country*. In 2010 Viet Nam achieved *middle income status*. Market reforms have led to one of the highest GDP growth rates in the world. It is widely perceived that such transformations should also correspond with improvements in gender equality and women's leadership. However, in Viet Nam the opposite appears to be true. Despite the fact that Viet Nam has always been a leader in Asia and in the world with regard to gender equality, the numbers are declining. In 2007, Viet Nam ranked 42nd in the world on the gender gap index, just behind Switzerland and well ahead of Bangladesh, China, Thailand, France and the Russian Federation. By 2011, all of those countries had bypassed Viet Nam, which slipped to 79<sup>th</sup> in the world (see Table 1).

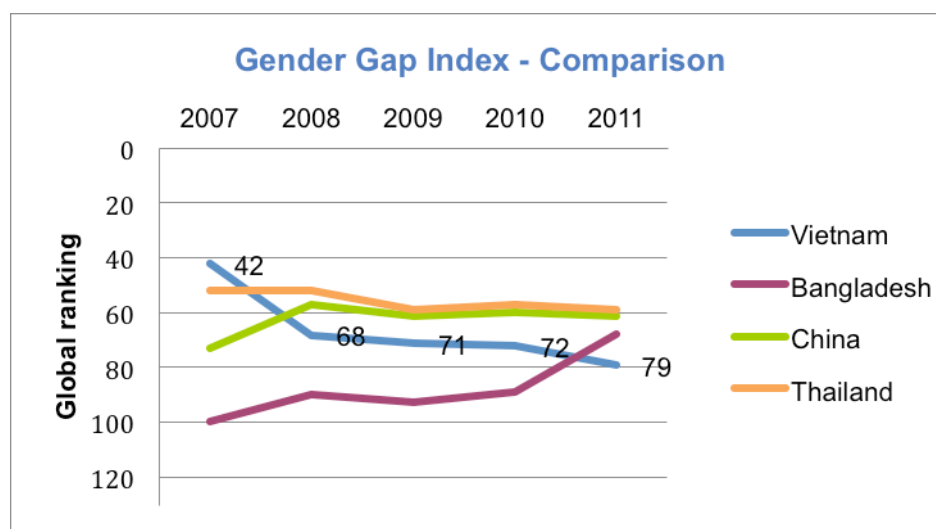


TABLE 1: Source: World Economic Forum The Global Gender Gap Report 2011

The purpose of this report is to focus on one area where women's leadership has decreased during the past ten years – the number of women elected to the National Assembly – in order to shed light on this paradox.

The report is based on a literature review, analysis of the legal and policy framework, as well as a field mission conducted by an international and an independent national consultant. A full description of the scope, research methodology interview questions can be found in Annex 1 and 2. The interviews were held over a period of three weeks in May 2012. The interviews included the following:

- 4 current Members of Parliament (MPs)
- 12 retired Members of Parliament
- 2 Government officials (MOLISA, Committee for Child Protection and Family)
- 3 Women's Union officials (national and provincial)
- 2 Fatherland Front members (national and provincial)
- 1 local NGO (Centre for Education, Promotion and Empowerment of Women)
- 5 representatives of international organizations (UNDP, UN Women)
- 1 defeated candidate

Following the interviews, a feedback session was conducted with 11 retired MPs and women advocates. At this session the women gave their responses to the preliminary findings and made recommendations.

A review of current legislation and policies shows that Viet Nam has a strong legal framework for gender equality and women's political participation (see annex 4). However, frequently targets are not met and implementation of the laws is sporadic.

The report begins with a background section that provides statistics on women's representation in Viet Nam over time; the economic and political context; international treaties and national laws and policies, and a discussion about implementation of those laws. The subsequent section discusses the electoral process in Viet Nam with the objective of determining which specific aspects of the nomination

and electoral process present barriers to women. The next section includes a discussion of the major institutional actors that impact women's representation — how they can improve their functions and activities to support women more effectively. In the final section we outline a broad set of recommendations that, if implemented, should significantly improve women's leadership in Viet Nam.

The current research is intended to be solutions-driven and practical, identifying the barriers to women's advancement in politics, the entry points for women and the policy changes that could reverse the trend, ie: Where is the problem? Who can act? What can they do? The purpose is not to point fingers but to identify openings and potential for action.

2. Background and Context

2.1 The numbers

2.1.1 International ranking

One of the areas where Viet Nam has always outperformed countries with similar economies is in women's political leadership. But during the past ten years there has been an inexplicable and marked decline in Viet Nam's relative position in the world regarding the number of women in parliament. In 1997, Viet Nam ranked among the top ten countries in the world on the Inter-Parliamentary Union rankings of women in national parliaments. In 2002, Viet Nam was still ranked 18th out of 118 countries. This put Viet Nam well ahead of Australia (19th), Laos (25th) and China (28th). By 2012, Viet Nam had dropped to 44th in the world (see Table 2).

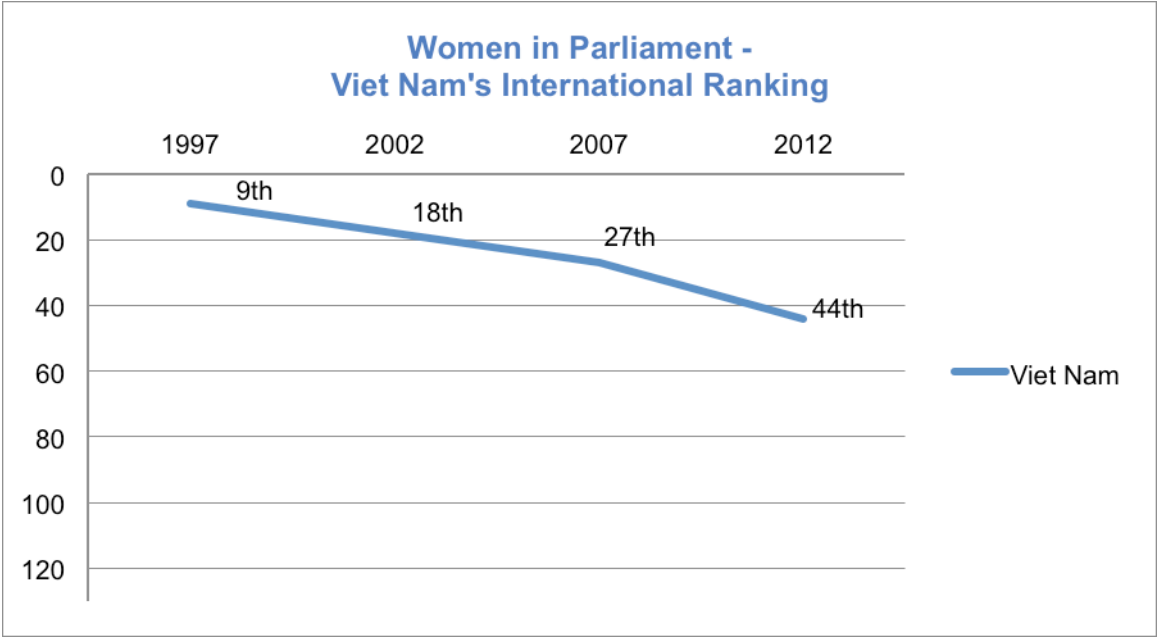


TABLE 2: Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union

At other levels of government, Viet Nam ranks 7<sup>th</sup> out of 21 Asian countries in the number of women in sub-national governments (Palmieri 2010). At the most senior levels, Viet Nam performs worse. According to the 2011 gender gap index, Viet Nam ranks 124th in the world and 20th (out of 22) in Asia for the number of women in Ministerial posts (Hausmann, Tyson and Zahidi 2011). A decade ago Viet Nam had the highest number of women in cabinet in Asia (Mitchell 2000). This is an embarrassingly fast decline.

The paradox is that while the number of women in leadership positions is declining rapidly, other gender indicators are improving. In 2011, Viet Nam ranked 1st in Asia and 13th in the world on women's labour force participation (Hausmann et. al. 2011). In 2008, female literacy rates in Viet Nam exceeded 90%, access to health care was at 85% and women accounted for 47% of the skilled workforce (Augustiana 2010). However, Viet Nam's continued progress in human and economic development may be put at risk due to this rapid decrease in women's political participation at the highest levels. Countries that perform poorly on gender equality also tend to be the lowest ranked countries with regard to achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (Tuminez 2012).

*“[new] analysis shows how power imbalances and gender inequalities at the national level are linked to reduced access to clean water and improved sanitation, land degradation, and deaths due to indoor and outdoor air pollution, thus amplifying the effects associated with income disparities. Gender inequalities also interact with environmental outcomes and make them worse.” (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report 2011)*

## 2.1.2 Number of women - trends

In order to determine the reasons for the decline in women’s political participation in Viet Nam, it is important to note that such fluctuations are not entirely unusual in Viet Nam’s history (see Table 3). The highest percentage of women in the National Assembly was in 1975, immediately after the American war. It declined rapidly from that point until shortly after the *đổi mới* economic reforms were initiated, hitting the lowest point to date in 1987, at which point the numbers began to climb again – peaking in 2002. Since then there has once again been a decline, although not as sharp as after 1975.

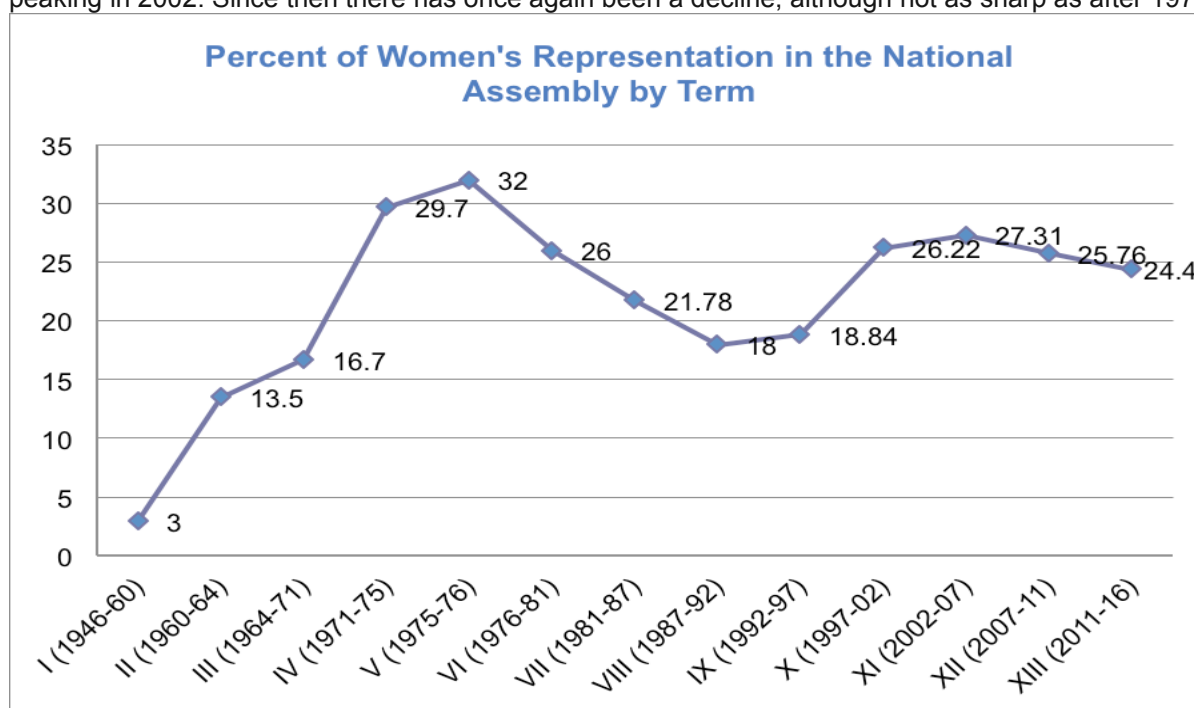


TABLE 3: Source: Office of the National Assembly, 2011. Reproduced from *Women’s Representation in Leadership in Viet Nam, 2012*

It is also important to note that while the numbers of women elected to the National Assembly is declining, this is not necessarily the case for other levels of government. Similarly, the number of women in senior leadership positions is declining in some areas but increasing in others. For example, while there are less than half as many heads of parliamentary committees who are women in the current term than ten years ago, there are actually more women in the powerful Standing Committee of the National Assembly (see Table 4).

**Percentage of women in the National Assembly during  
2002–2007, 2007–2011 and 2011–2016**

Position	2002-2007	2007-2011	2011-2016
Members of the National Assembly	27.30	25.76	24.4
Members of the Standing Committee	22.20	15.76	23.53
Heads of Committees	25.00	22.22	11.11

TABLE 4: Source: Office of the National Assembly, 2011. Reproduced from *Women’s Representation in Leadership in Viet Nam, 2012*

When looking at the provincial and local levels of government over the same period, there has in fact been a slight increase in women's representation (See Table 5). While the scope of this report is limited to the National Assembly, it is important to note that the negative trend at the national level is not necessarily replicating at the local level. There could be any number of reasons for this, including that local-level campaigns are very different and more personal than those at the national level. However it does indicate that there is a strong basis from which to build in order to improve the numbers at the national level.

**Percentage of women in provincial, district and commune People's Councils during 1999–2004, 2004–2011 and 2011–2016**

	1994-2004	2004-2011	2011-2016
Provincial level	22.33	23.80	25.70
District level	20.12	22.94	24.62
Commune level	16.10	19.53	27.71

TABLE 5: Source: Office of the National Assembly, 2011. Reproduced from *Women's Representation in Leadership in Viet Nam, 2012*

Another important trend is that the quality of female elected representatives is improving. “*Female MPs are much more vocal and ready to speak out*” says one current member of the National Assembly. The education level and professional background of female MPs is also increasing. Almost all of the respondents cited the increase in the quality of women as a positive advance, except one respondent who said that women today are there mainly as tokens and do not have the influence that they used to have.

### 2.1.3 Targets

Regardless of the level of government, the one constant is that the targets that have been set by the Vietnamese Government, through various gender strategies, have not been met. In the last election, while there was no official quota despite attempts to draft a law to this effect (Duong 2012), the National Strategy on Gender Equality set a target to elect a minimum of 30% women. There were 31% nominated as candidates and 24.4% elected. The target for the next election in 2016 is a minimum of 35% women's representation (National Strategy on Gender Equality for the period 2011–2020, as per Resolution 57/NQ-CP, 1 December 2009). The Law is vague on this subject. Article 10a of the Gender Equality Law requires that an “appropriate” number of women are elected, but the actual numbers are left to regulations with very few guidelines. By the same amendment, the Viet Nam Women's Union (VWU) must be consulted when the targets are being established:

*“The number of women members of the National Assembly is estimated based on the request of the Presidium of the Central Standing Committee of Viet Nam Women Union, ensuring appropriate representation of women”*  
(Article 10a of the Gender Equality Law)

In our interview with officials from the National Viet Nam Women's Union, they indicated that the VWU normally proposed a target of between 45–50% women on the ballot. But since they are involved at the beginning of the “first negotiation”, they have little control over the final numbers once other interests are taken into account. While the Women's Union does conduct “monitoring” missions to the 63 provinces and cities and has the authority to request additional names of women on the ballots, there are varying opinions about the extent to which the Women's Union uses its authority. Some respondents who had worked closely with the Women's Union credit its work with their electoral success, especially at the provincial level. While several other respondents were critical that the VWU is not using the powers it has been given. An example is the fact that at the most recent congress of the VWU, the issue of women's political representation was not on the agenda. Nonetheless, in our interviews with representatives of the Women's Union, they affirmed their commitment to equal representation of women in representative bodies.

## 2.2 International treaties

Viet Nam is a signatory to a number of international treaties regarding equality for women. In 1980/82 Viet Nam became a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which states in Article 7 that:

*“Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right: (a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies; (b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government; (c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country” (Source: CEDAW)*

Viet Nam has also ratified the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). MDG3 specifically provides measurable targets on promoting gender equality and empowering women, including the number of seats held by women in the national parliament.

## 2.3 Economic and Political context

After a period of rapid growth in the 1990's, Viet Nam's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth has slowed to about 5%, or 3% on a per capita basis, with inflation near 20% (Fforde 2011). This slowing down of economic growth and real income brings with it new social challenges. Some of the women interviewed suggested that the Communist Party has been “distracted” from its socialist values by the more pressing needs of dealing with an economic downturn. They also suggested that with youth unemployment comes new social ills such as drugs and crime, and that mothers are increasingly worried about their teenaged children and are refraining from participating in the high demands of politics in order to guard their families against these “vices”. Conversely, some interviewees suggested that with the new market reforms, many women have found alternative means of economic and career advancement and are not necessarily as interested in pursuing politics as a means of self-promotion. Recent trends regarding women's leadership cannot be separated from the current economic and political circumstances.

## 2.4 Legal and policy framework

By international standards, Viet Nam has a very good legal foundation and policy framework for gender equality (see Annex 4 for a comprehensive list). For those who wish to champion women's leadership, there is strong basis in law from which to draw. In fact, the question should not be whether Viet Nam is living up to international norms, but rather why it is not meeting its obligations under national laws.

The Vietnamese Constitution ensures that:

*“Male and female citizens have equal rights in all fields and all acts of discrimination against women and all acts damaging Women's dignity are strictly prohibited.”*  
(Viet Nam Constitution)

The Gender Equality Law is the main legal framework through which women can realize their rights. The National Strategy on Gender Equality 2011-2020 includes women's representation as one of its components. It forms part of the Social Economic Development Strategy for the period 2011-2020 and will continue to specify policies of the Party and the State on gender equality in the next ten years. At the same time, it will promote the current achievements from the National Strategy for Advancement of Women to 2010. The National Program on Gender Equality (2011) includes a specific activity area on strengthening women leaders at the administrative and legislative level as well as strengthening the women candidates for the 2016 elections. There are also several Communist Party Politburo Resolutions that provide direction on implementation and monitoring of these laws, including Resolution 11 (April 27, 2007), which sets a target of a minimum of 35% to 40% women in the National Assembly and People's Councils by 2020. In addition, a number of Decrees and Decisions provide further clarity on responsibilities and penalties.

## 2.5 Implementation of laws and policies

The reason that Viet Nam is not meeting its own targets is clearly not because of a lack of laws and policies on gender equality. The problem is with implementation of existing laws. Because the Gender Equality Law is vague, for example using words such as “appropriate” representation, much of the practice is determined by regulations and guidelines. One of the biggest problems is that there is no specific person or organization responsible for achieving the targets, and few sanctions for not meeting them. This means that much of the implementation depends on political will. In the absence of clear direction and monitoring from the national level, the results depend heavily on the individual disposition of local senior officials and the relative strength of the local Women’s Union.

*“Years ago, it was an embarrassment to a local official if his province did not elect a single woman. I remember one provincial Communist Party secretary who actually hid out of fear and shame when the head of the National Women’s Union came to see him. But now, nobody is watching anymore, there are no sanctions.” – retired MP*

One of the problems identified during the interviews is the fact that there are not enough women’s advocates in high-level decision-making positions who can promote women and that many men in senior positions are not promoting women. These include the Politburo, Party committees, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Personnel Department of the Communist Party and the Standing Committee of the National Assembly. Several respondents referred to the fact that when there was a woman as vice-head of the personnel department of the Communist Party, there were far more women promoted to senior positions. However it was noted that this success was due to the personal commitment of this individual to deliberately promote women. Simply placing women into senior positions is not a guarantee that they will promote other women:

*“You need a woman who shares a commitment to gender equality, a feminist. Since 1930, a woman has been on the Politburo only twice, including now. And the number of women on the Standing Committee of the National Assembly is higher now. But the number of women elected is going down. It depends on the person, their awareness and commitment.” - retired MP*

The number of women in positions of influence in the Communist Party remains low at all levels (see Table 6). At the national level, the number of women in Party committees remains less than 9%.

### Percentage of women in central, provincial, district and commune party committees during 2001–2005, 2006-2010 and 2011-2016

Executive Committee	2001 – 2006	2006- 2010	2011- 2016
Central level	8.6	8.13	8.57
Provincial level	11.32	11.75	11.37
District level	12.89	14.70	15.01
Commune level	11.88	15.08	18.01

TABLE 6: Source: Viet Nam Women’s Union, 2011 reproduced from *Women’s Representation in Leadership in Viet Nam, 2012*

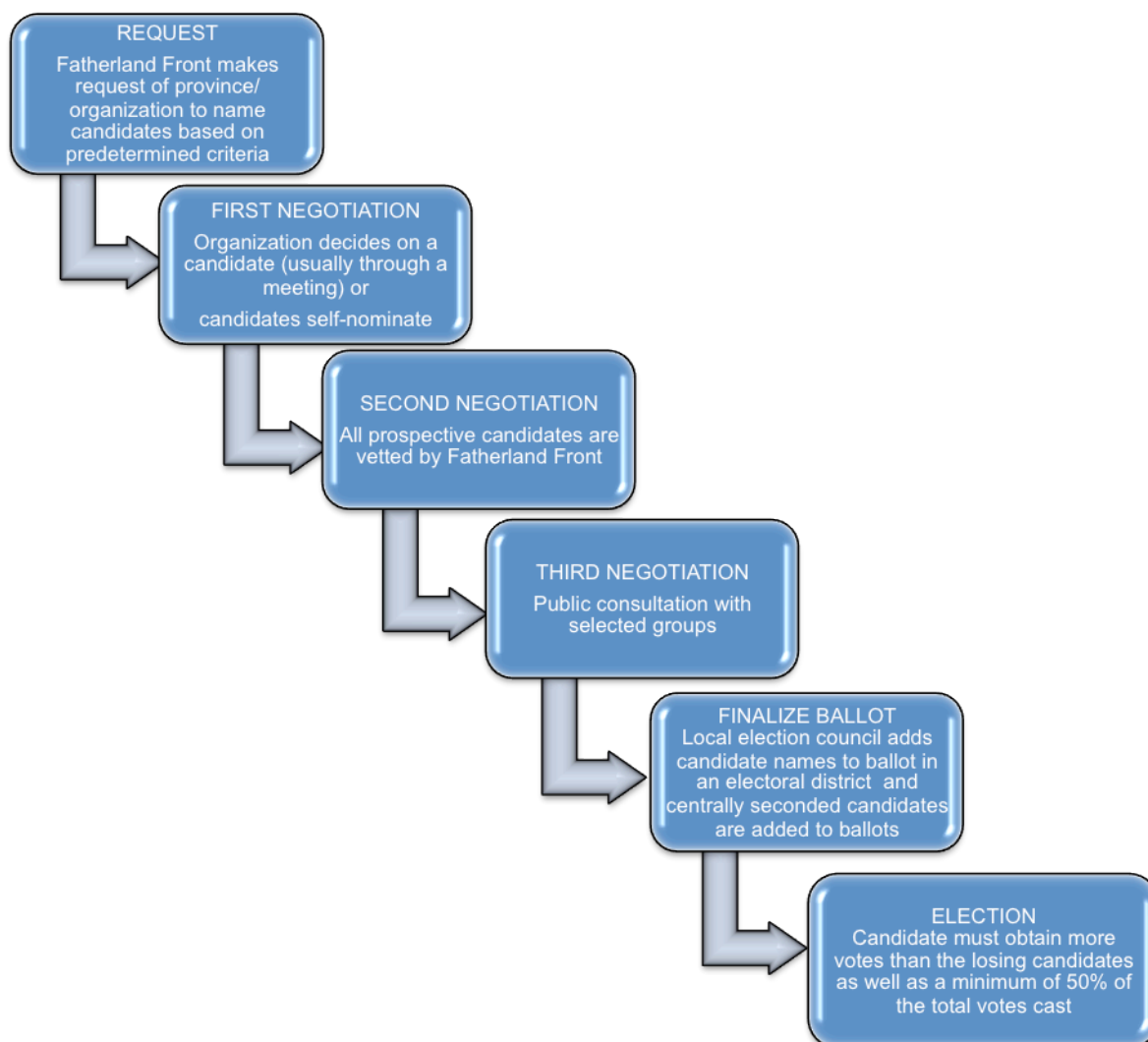
## 3. Process : Where do we lose women?

International best practices identify three phases during the electoral process where women can be either encouraged or lost. These include: a) political “aspirants” – those women who make up the pool of potential candidates but who have not yet taken any active steps toward entering politics; b) nominees – women who are in the process of being nominated by their Party; and c) candidates – women whose names appear on the ballot. In many countries, the greatest loss occurs during the first two phases; once a woman’s name appears on a ballot she usually has a similar likelihood of being elected as equally qualified male counterparts. In order to understand where the challenges are in electing women to the National Assembly of Viet Nam, it is vital to analyze the electoral process through each of these phases, in order to identify the barriers and the potential entry points for women.



### 3.1 Process of candidate selection and nomination in Viet Nam

While the process was described differently by each of the women we interviewed, there were some patterns that indicate the general steps. In some cases, certain steps were pro forma only or missing entirely, but those appear to be exceptions. See annex 5 for a more indepth description of the written process as outlined in the law and formal policies. The following is based on the practical experience of the respondents:



**Step 1.** Fatherland Front makes a request of an agency, government body or organization to propose candidates

- This is based on guidance from the Standing Committee of the National Assembly, the National Electoral Commission and the highest levels of the Communist Party.
- The Fatherland Front at the national level sends the “structure” (in Vietnamese: cơ cấu) to the provincial Fatherland Front in each of the 63 provinces.
- The term “structure” refers to the specific criteria required for each eligible seat. This can be general (ie: 30% women) or very specific (ie: someone working for a particular public enterprise or university). The structure must balance all national interests, such as farmers, regions, youth, business, scientists, ethnicities and women. To guarantee national representation of all societal sectors, this structure leaves little flexibility at the provincial level.
- The provincial Fatherland Front receives the structural guidelines and sends requests to each specific organization to provide names of candidates who meet the criteria.
- Self-nominated candidates are not proposed by an organization but fill out a form which they can get from the local Fatherland Front.

**Step 2.** The nominating organization (whether the provincial People’s Committees, a Union, a public enterprise, etc.) holds a meeting to decide on a candidate to propose (first negotiation). Sometimes this is only a formality since there may only be one candidate who meets all the criteria and has

sufficient seniority. Other times there may be more candidates than there are spots and candidates will be asked questions to determine the most suitable one. The meetings are organized by the nominating body and are limited to select groups.

**Step 3.** The proposed names are vetted by Fatherland Front (second negotiation).

**Step 4.** The vetted names are put to public consultation through a series of selected group meetings (third negotiation), during which time some candidates are eliminated by the local Fatherland Front.

- This is staggered and includes Question and Answer sessions with groups affiliated with the candidates, such as their place of employment, the umbrella group for their occupation or their trade union.
- The meetings are organized by the local Fatherland Front and participation is by invitation.
- Topics include the candidate's family history, personal character, and the veracity of their resume.

**Step 5.** The local Election Council, with guidance from the provincial People's Council and local Party representatives, decide which district to place each candidate, and the candidate's name is added to a ballot in a chosen district. At this point, candidates proposed by the Central level ("centrally seconded candidates") are added to the ballot as well. These include senior Party and government officials, incumbent MPs and representatives from the national Fatherland Front. In 2011, 182 out of 500 elected representatives were centrally seconded.

**Step 6.** To be elected, the candidate must obtain a double majority - more votes than the losing candidates, as well as a minimum of 50% of the total votes cast.

### 3.2 Aspirants

There are several factors that influence whether a woman who is qualified and interested actually becomes a candidate. The following are the reasons most often cited during the interviews.

#### 3.2.1 Social and family pressure

Most of the MPs and retired MPs interviewed spoke about the difficulties of balancing family life and a political career. They spoke of the triple workload – women are expected to take on the main responsibilities for domestic work and caregiving, to maintain their own work and career, as well as politics. Some of the women interviewed in fact stated that when they were first approached to run for office, they did not want to do it but felt a sense of obligation to the Party. Two women cited family reasons as the main reason why they did not seek re-election. Almost all of the women who had long political careers (three terms or more) indicated that their husbands had been very supportive and had taken on extra tasks, such as driving children to school or going to the market. Others point to their good fortune that their parents were still in good health and could take on child-care responsibilities. However, each one of them referred to "other" female MPs whose children began to fail at school and get into trouble, and several made references to marital breakdown and infidelity as a consequence of women's political involvement and the demand to be away from home for long periods of time. There were references also to the difficulties that men face whose wives hold positions that are more senior than theirs, including ridicule from other men. Most of those interviewed stated that for Vietnamese women, no matter how prominent they become, the family is still their first priority, and that social relations within the family are still based on patriarchal attitudes.

*"When we women go home, we must forget that we are executives, and become subordinate and submissive. We work twice as hard at our chores because of the guilt we feel about being away. For some of us this is very hard and makes us depressed."*  
– retired MP

*"I never talk to my husband about my political work, he is a businessman and is not interested in these things."* – current MP

*"One of my male colleagues told me that I should retire because at my age I should be home looking after my grandchildren."* – retired MP



The issue of family-related responsibilities was greater for women who were young when they were first elected. The problem appears to be similar whether the women were part-time or full-time members<sup>1</sup>. One full-time MP spoke about the fact that for the first three years after she was elected she was living in Ha Noi and her family remained in her home province. Her children were very young and she was separated from them. After three years she decided to move the family to Ha Noi but with this came other difficulties, including uprooting her husband and her elderly mother-in-law. For part-time MPs however, the challenge can be even greater because they are expected to add their political responsibilities and related travel on top of already demanding careers. One young MP said that she did not seek re-election because it was not possible to balance her role as an MP with her professional career and with her local political responsibilities:

*“My husband was supportive, but being part-time as an MP is not good. I would do it if it were full-time. But I had to go to Ha Noi 3-4 times a year, for a month each time. Plus I had to travel outside Viet Nam often because I spoke English. I wanted another child, and had already put it off for 5 years. There are not many young women with children in parliament.”*

– former MP

One possible solution would be for the National Assembly to provide a budget for MPs to travel more often between Ha Noi and their constituencies. In Ho Chi Minh City, the provincial People’s Council does in fact have a budget for national MPs to travel. However in other cases the budget is limited to the required meetings in Ha Noi – which can often mean a month or more away from their family – and travel budgets for other provinces which can be insufficient.

*“In some cases you see MPs eating food in the streets because their allowance is not enough.”* – retired MP

*“If we could have a budget to be able to come home more often to see our families, it would make a big difference. But Viet Nam is not yet as advanced as other countries and the National Assembly budget is very limited.”* – retired MP

While the women interviewed spoke of the problems with expectations regarding family life, they were quick to point out that this is not only coming from men, but from women themselves. They cited examples where other women were campaigning against them in order to “spare them” from the extra burden:

*“Our own mothers were telling people to take pity on us, that they should spare us the extra work by not voting for us. They meant this in the best way, for our own benefit.”*

– retired MP

According to a 2011 study, 91.3% of women surveyed listed family duties as the biggest restraint on women’s career advancement (PyD 2011).

### 3.2.2 Patriarchal social attitudes

Several of those interviewed referred not only to women’s role within the family but to larger difficulties emerging from a patriarchal society. Several respondents spoke about the fact that Viet Nam’s “feudal” history was still influencing gender relations in society. This includes the use of language which is almost always masculine in a political context. One female MP said that she deliberately uses the word “comrade” in her speeches rather than “he” in order to be gender-neutral. The male-dominated culture has a major impact not only on how voters perceive female candidates, but also on how women self-restrain.

*“I did not tell anyone that I was a candidate for the National Assembly because I was embarrassed and afraid of failure. I didn’t even tell some of my close friends and family. They were surprised when they saw my name on the ballot.”* – current MP

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<sup>1</sup> Most Members of Parliament work part-time and continue to work in their own professions. The National Assembly sits twice per year for one month (3 days of plenary followed by committee meetings and another 3 days of plenary at the end). Full-time members move to Ha Noi and are typically committee chairs or vice-chairs. One MP is named the head of the provincial delegation and remains in the home constituency but still works full-time.

Attributes that in men are seen as positive – such as ambition, courage and determination – are seen as negative in women. One study reported that “female leaders are labeled with the characteristics like obedience, emotion, dedication, and restraint which are considered inappropriate for leadership.” (Nguyen Thi Thu Ha 2008 – cited in PyD report 2011).

Some of those interviewed also referred to the way in which men and women socialize. One organization that conducts training for female candidates where they are given the chance to mingle with senior officials and leaders, said that while the men would be networking and promoting themselves, women would sit at the side and remain quiet. In addition, the so-called “drinking culture” means that men are always building relationships and socializing and meeting people who could advance their careers, while women are at home in the evenings looking after domestic responsibilities.

One way that women have been able to counter the “old boys network” in other countries has been to develop strong networks amongst women as well as mixed networks of women and men, where they build each other’s confidence and mentor and promote one another. Viet Nam has a strong basis for this with the existing mass movements, especially the Women’s Union. Where the Women’s Union is strong and helps to foster networks for women, there is an increase in the number of women in leadership positions. This is one of the most obvious entry points for women if it is done systemically and deliberately and if the successes in some provinces are shared and replicated in others.

### Quang Ninh Case Study

In Quang Ninh province the Women’s Union has created a network of strong women who organize and support each other, identify young women with potential and groom them for leadership, in order to ensure the next generation succeeds. While the network was initially established by the Women’s Union, it operates informally and outside of current political structures. The more senior women in the network identify young women and guide them in their careers over years. They provide encouragement and career advice, and use their extensive links with other women inside the government to push for promotions. Once the network makes a decision to support someone, everyone works to promote that person regardless of internal divisions. In this way, women are not competing with one another and therefore undermining each other’s efforts at promotion. One female MP attributes her success to the support she received from this network:

*“These are the key people who strategize, identify young women who display the potential for leadership, promote women and help them overcome their difficulties. Together women decide on who to support for which posts. So, for instance, when I ran they supported me even though I was young, but they had already agreed on another post for the more senior woman who was also on the ballot with me. They lobby together. They take leadership and avoid duplication and convince the voters. They groom their replacements”. – current MP*

One of the methods in which women in Quang Ninh work together is by ensuring that once they have moved on from a position, another woman replaces them. One MP referred to the fact that she had been the first girl to lead the youth union in her high school, and when she left she ensured another girl took her place. Similarly retired MPs do not perceive their job as finished, it is their responsibility to help guide the careers of younger women to ensure that they build on their success. In this way, the advances made by one generation are not reversed in future generations.

### 3.2.3 Changing economy

One of the differences between Viet Nam and other countries where they are undergoing rapid economic transformations is that in Viet Nam women have always been active as entrepreneurs and in the workforce. According to several respondents, many of the most successful new business elites are women. These economic transformations are giving women alternatives to politics.

*“In the past, the only way to gain status and a good lifestyle was to go into government and politics, but now women are finding other ways. They enjoy life. Why would they put that aside for the uncertainties and difficult life of an MP?”*  
– government official

While there are regulations and limits on the use of public finances for electoral campaigns, there are few regulations on private spending. This may give an advantage to private business candidates who may use their funds to their advantage. One solution would be for Viet Nam to look at international models and pass laws limiting the use of private or business funds for election purposes. While it does not yet appear to be a gender gap issue in Viet Nam, the lack of access to money is one of the main barriers to women's political participation at the global level. Passing strong regulations would prevent Viet Nam from following the path of other countries where money and private business are a major factor in influencing who is elected and where women face a glass ceiling unless they come from wealthy or politically-connected families.

### 3.2.4 Opportunities for advancement

A common argument cited for the lack of women in parliament is that there are “not enough qualified women”. While that statement is questionable, it is true that the pools from which candidates are drawn – Directors and Deputy Directors of departments, provincial People's Council leadership, senior Party officials – have disproportionately fewer women. Therefore, the question of why women do not advance in their public sector careers is directly relevant to women's political participation, especially in a country like Viet Nam where seniority is an important factor in deciding who to elect, compared with other countries where factors such as charisma, public profile and personal popularity are more decisive indicators of electability.

Women are severely under-represented among the chairs and vice-chairs of provincial People's Councils – which is not only a pool of potential candidates but also a “gatekeeper” body determining who will be a candidate and succeed. At the provincial level, the percentage of chairs of People's Councils held by women is only 1.56% (see Table 7). The percentage of women chairs of People's Committees (the administrative arm of provincial government) is hardly better at 3.12% (see Table 8). According to an interview with officials from the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA), only 40% of People's Councils or committees have any women as a chair or vice-chair. Ministry officials said that they have set a target that will see at least one woman in these positions in 70-80% of People's Councils and People's Committees. Since the provincial government is almost always represented in the National Assembly based on the “structure” requirements, until there are more women in these positions, this limits the number of “slots” available to women.

**Percentage of women as chairs and vice-chairs in provincial, district and commune People's Councils during 1999–2004, 2004–2011 and 2011–2016**

Positions	Provincial level		District level		Commune level	
	1999-2004	2004-2011	1999-2004	2004-2011	1999-2004	2004-2011
Chair	1.64	1.56	5.46	3.92	3.46	4.09
Vice-chair	8.19	28.13	11.42	20.26	5.60	10.61

TABLE 7: Source: Viet Nam Women's Union, 2011 reproduced from *Women's Representation in Leadership in Viet Nam*, 2012

**Percentage of women as chairs and vice-chairs in provincial, district and commune People's Committees during 1999–2004, 2004–2011 and 2011–2016**

Positions	Provincial level		District level		Commune level	
	1999-2004	2004-2011	1999-2004	2004-2011	1999-2004	2004-2011
Chair	1.64	3.12	5.27	3.02	3.74	3.42
Vice-chair	12.05	16.08	11.42	14.48	8.48	8.84

TABLE 8: Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, 2011 reproduced from *Women's Representation in Leadership in Viet Nam*, 2012

In public sector departments, women are also under-represented at leadership levels and tend to be confined to the Number-2 slot, a widespread glass ceiling to women's promotion. In 2010, the number of women in “Party organs, socio-political organizations, state management, security and defense

agencies” was only 26.7%. (GSO, Report on Labor and Employment 2010, cited in *Women’s Representation in Leadership in Viet Nam*, 2012).

Women are given fewer opportunities for training. According to the World Bank, women account for only 10-20% of the participants in courses on management theory at the national level (World Bank, Report on Gender Assessment in Viet Nam, cited in *Women’s Representation in Leadership in Viet Nam*, 2012). This is aggravated by age limits on training and scholarly opportunities, which discriminate against women, who often need to take time out of the workforce for childbirth and family obligations. In fact, the differential age of retirement – women in the public sector face mandatory retirement at age 55 as opposed to 60 for men – is the most often cited reason for women’s lack of career advancement. This will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

The lack of women in leadership in the public sector has a disproportionate impact on Women’s political participation, given the strong focus on seniority and “structure” in the electoral framework. Some retired MPs have expressed frustration that women in current leadership positions are not doing more to push for qualified women:

*“When I was on the Standing Committee of the National Assembly, I fought to promote women based on their qualifications, not based on whether they checked off various quota groups. But since I left, the number of women in the highest positions has been reduced. There are fewer women as chairs of People’s Councils, head of the Party in the provinces, or as team leaders of local MP groups.” – retired MP*

### 3.2.5 Age discrimination

The single most often-cited reason for the lack of advancement of women in Viet Nam is the differential age of retirement. In fact, this single policy puts Viet Nam into a small category of countries that continues to perpetuate state-sponsored gender discrimination through official public policy, and it has been roundly criticized by the United Nations and other international organizations. This is one of the first things that outsiders learn about Viet Nam and it is a blight on its international reputation. The impact of this law on women’s political aspirations cannot be under-stated. Just at the moment when women have the life achievements that would qualify them for elected office, they are taken out of the running. While the law may benefit women working in hard labour positions, it is possible to build in mechanisms for individuals to choose whether to take early retirement or to continue working. Not only is this a basic rights issue, but also an economic issue. During those 5 years while women become a draw on the public treasury through retirement pensions, they could be contributing to the GDP of the country.

Most of the women interviewed pointed out that age discrimination is perpetuated throughout a woman’s career, not just at retirement. First, women lose out on promotion possibilities because of time taken off for child-rearing. By the time she returns to work, she is facing the age limits on training which are capped at age 40. And for post-graduate scholarships the age limit is 35. Once she is 40, she is no longer considered for paths of promotion because her retirement age is at 55 and so there are not enough years left to make it worthwhile to promote her. When she retires at 55, she therefore has a lower pension than men who have 5 extra years to earn salary increases. Given that electoral success is based on seniority, many women are ineligible to stand for office because they rarely reach the senior levels needed to qualify as a candidate.

Some solutions include increasing the age for *both* men and women by 5 years, but this is roundly condemned by the women we interviewed as only pushing the gap by five years. Similarly, the ability to apply for an exception to the retirement age based on professional occupations is rejected by the women as forcing them to ask for what is theirs by right:

*“The labour code does make some exceptions for top leadership positions, this is applied on and off, but you must request an exception. That is why I didn’t run again, I was not going to ask to stay. It should be a right, not an arbitrary decision. It simply doesn’t do for a middle income country to have to explain to the world the incomprehensible policy that there is a differential retirement age for men and women.” – retired MP*

The most equal solution would be to give women and men a choice of retirement age between a certain range – for instance 55-60 – and then leave it to the individual to determine their own preferences. This will also need to be coupled with the changes to other age-discriminatory practices

that have resulted from the unequal retirement age such as age limits for nomination for training and age limits for promotion.

### 3.2.6 Motivation

One of the issues raised by several of those interviewed was whether women are motivated to enter politics. For several of them, they admitted to an initial reluctance and a sense of obligation based on their sense of duty. According to a 2011 report by the Spanish Association for Peace and Development in Viet Nam (PyD), the main reasons why women run for office is for training opportunities and relationships, followed by social prestige. Men rank the motivation of social prestige and salary higher than women.

One retired MP who decided not to seek a second term described her disappointment with the influence wielded by members of parliament. She said that a lot more women would be interested in politics if they felt that their participation would make a difference, and noted that the situation is slowly improving:

*“The role of parliament is changing too, which makes more women want to go there. Twenty years ago the National Assembly was really just ceremonial, a rubber stamp, there was no real debate. MPs were not strong professionals. Today it is more open.”* - retired MP

The influence of the elected representatives is diminished by the fact that most of them are only part-time MPs and continue to work in their current profession, only attending two parliamentary sessions per year for a few weeks each. Only 29% of MPs are full-time and of the remaining part-time MPs, almost 100 of them work for the government in their regular jobs (Augustiana 2010). In addition, women are not given as many leadership roles in the National Assembly as men are. Only 23.6% of committee members are women, dropping to 17.5% of full-time committee members, and only one committee is chaired by a woman (Women's Representation in Leadership in Viet Nam, 2012).

*“Part-time members affect the quality of the National Assembly, their voice is not as high as expected. There needs to be more independence. If I am part-time and affiliated to an organization, I can't exactly speak freely. I must consider how my words impact the organization.”* – retired MP

## 3.3 Nominees

Here the research found that there are primarily four ways in which candidates are identified: proposed by (a) provincial government and other official bodies; (b) by social and professional associations; (c) by central government and other official bodies but centrally seconded to various provinces; and (d) self-nominated. In 2011, there were 827 candidates, of whom only 15 were self-nominated and 182 were centrally seconded. The majority – 630 candidates – were nominated by government and other official bodies. Those candidates must go through what is referred to colloquially as the “3 negotiations” before they are placed on the ballot:

**First negotiation:** the nominating organization holds a selection meeting to choose who will represent them.

**Second negotiation:** the Fatherland Front reviews the profile of the candidate.

**Third Negotiation:** community consultation – consists of public meetings with selected groups organized by the local Fatherland Front.

Between the first negotiation and the third is where the percentage of women drops from 45-50% proposed by the Women's Union to 31% - which was the actual number of female candidates in 2011 (Fatherland Front report to Parliament on the 2011 Elections).



### 3.3.1 Candidates proposed by local associations and provincial government bodies

In Viet Nam every group in society is given representation in the National Assembly as part of the unofficial social contract that is the basis for the success of the Communist Party. The careful selection of which organizations, state-owned enterprises, mass movements, and economic sectors are represented is done at the highest level (Standing Committee of the National Assembly, Politburo, Central Committee of the Party) and is based on careful political considerations. The instructions that are sent to the provincial Fatherland front leave little room for flexibility.

Given that these “structural” requirements include local political leaders, heads of public sector departments and other traditionally male-dominated fields, such as police and military, it leaves few available slots for women or for other “quota” groups such as youth, ethnic minorities, and non-Communist Party members. As a result, it is common that local officials must accommodate all of these groups in one or two remaining “slots”, resulting in a “doubling-up” of such groups – so they will seek young women who are also from ethnic minorities or non-Communist Party members. One young female MP describes her election as follows:

*“I was nominated by my University. I represented education, I was young and a woman and non-Party member - I was just short of having my Communist Party membership approved when I was elected. So I filled many hats. The Director of the People’s Council of the province asked the University to select a candidate. They gave them several criteria to fill with this candidate – women, young and non-Communist. They had to select from the management level. I was a vice-director. So the University proposed my name and held a general meeting. At the meeting I was approved as their candidate. There was nobody else.” - retired MP*

One of the possible solutions cited by those interviewed is that the “structure” be more flexible: rather than stating explicitly that a university or hospital be represented, it should refer to percentages, ie: 30% from the social sector. This would give local authorities more room to seek out the best potential representatives, including prominent women.

### 3.3.2 Centrally seconded candidates

Before the criteria (structure) is passed on to the provincial Fatherland Fronts, a certain number of parliamentary seats are set aside to make sure that incumbent MPs and other voices from the national level are included. While these “centrally seconded” candidates are mainly based in Ha Noi, they must be elected at the local level. The National Fatherland Front chooses which provinces to send them to. In most cases, the individuals are given an opportunity to provide a list of preferred constituencies, but there is no guarantee that these will be feasible.

When a candidate is centrally seconded, it does not guarantee that they will be elected. During the last election (2011) out of 30 National Assembly seats in Ha Noi there were 11 centrally seconded candidates, but two of them did not get elected.

#### Example of a fictitious “structure” in a province:

The province has 8 electoral seats available. These are broken down as follows:

- A national Minister seconded by the central government
- An incumbent MP seconded by the central government
- A leader of the province (head of the People’s Council, Peoples Committee or Party)
- A head or vice-head of a major public enterprise
- A leader from the local Trade Union
- The chief of police
- The director of a local hospital or university
- One remaining seat to cover all the other “quota” groups, including women

#### Breakdown of the 182 centrally seconded candidates:

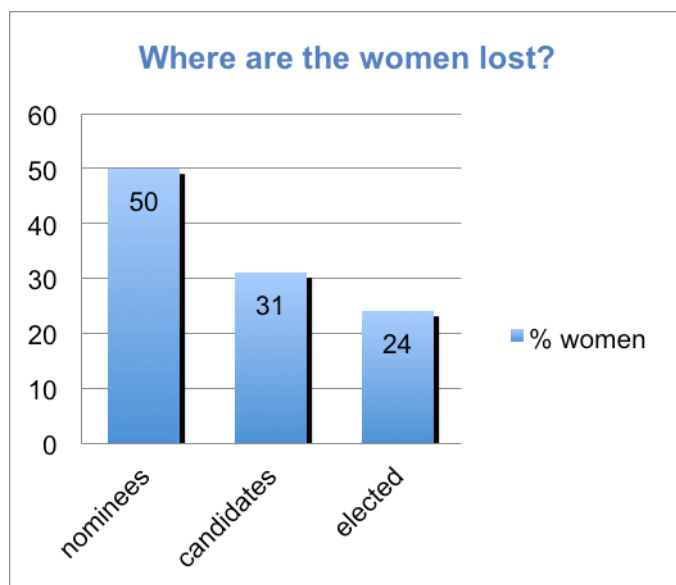
- Members of the Politburo
- Central government Ministers
- Members of the Standing Committee of the National Assembly (SCNA)
- 30 out of the 46 member organizations of the Fatherland Front (including always one spot for the Women’s Union)
- Incumbents to be re-elected (decided by the SCNA)
- New names from the National Assembly Office or government offices (public service) or major SOEs (e.g. Petro Viet Nam or Electricity of Viet Nam – EVN)

*“They put me in a rural district which I thought at first was puzzling. Imagine me parachuting from Ha Noi to a small village where I have never been? I said to my husband “this must be a joke”, I thought I would be unwelcome there. It turned out the head of the local Party was flattered to have me there and I was very welcomed. I made a special effort to get to know the issues that concerned the local people. But in some other cases where centrally seconded candidates have been sent to provincial districts, it might not work as well.” – retired MP*

According to our interviews with the Women’s Union, the number of women among the centrally seconded candidates is only 11%, far lower than among candidates proposed by organizations. Part of this is because these candidates include senior Party officials, Ministers and full-time incumbent MPs – in which women are already under-represented.

### 3.3.3 Self-nominated candidates

There is also a category of candidates who are not proposed by the “structure” or by any organization. These are self-selected candidates who fill out a form provided by the local Fatherland Front. After that the process is similar for them as for other candidates, including the vetting and community consultations. There is no indication on the ballot whether a candidate was self-nominated, centrally seconded or proposed by an organization. But the number of self-nominated candidates who succeed is very small. In 2002 – the first year where self-nominated candidates were allowed - there were only 2 elected. In 2007 there was just a single self-nominated candidate who won, and in the current National Assembly there are 4 (National Assembly website). In 2011, 268 individuals self-nominated however after the third negotiation and vetting process, only 15 were left to run as candidates. All self-nominated candidates are from the provinces. The researchers were not able to get a gender breakdown of those who self-nominated.



Successful self-nominated candidates are usually renowned scientists and others who succeed based on their professional profile. Communist Party members are not precluded from running as self-nominated candidates, however it would be unlikely that a Party member would wish to do so if the Party was not supportive. One young woman told us that when she had been elected she felt frustrated by the limitations placed upon her by her nominating organization, and that in the future she planned to run as a self-nominated candidate in order to have more independence. As the private sector expands in Viet Nam, this may also provide an entry point for business people or other “often-overlooked” candidates, including women.

TABLE 9: Source: Viet Nam Fatherland Front

Table 9 shows the different stages in the electoral process for women based on 2011 numbers. In the initial stage (nominees), the Women’s Union suggests 45-50% female candidates. However after the selection and vetting process is complete, the actual number of women on the ballot (candidates) is only 31%, resulting in 24.4% elected.

## 3.4 Candidates

While the majority of women are lost during the nomination process, there is also a decline between the number of women on the ballot and the number who are elected. In 2011, there were 241 women

(37.1%) proposed by local organizations at provincial level<sup>2</sup> and 21 women (11.54%) centrally seconded for an average of 31.5% of women candidates. Of this total, 24.4% women were elected. In past years, the ratio between candidates and elected was similar (see Table 10).

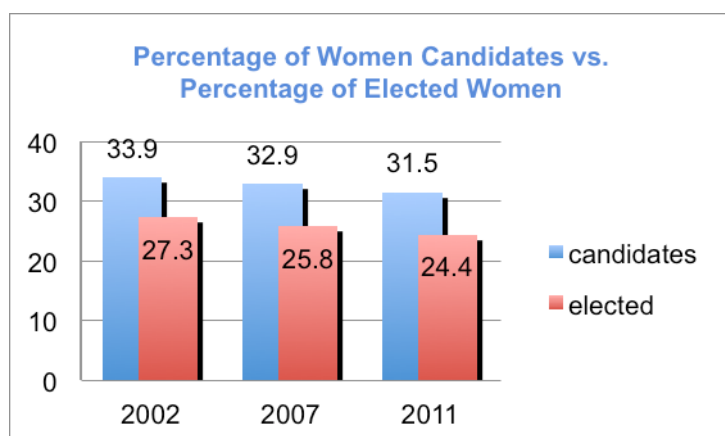


TABLE 10: Source: Women's Union, 2012

We can observe that there has been a small decline in the percentage of women candidates in the last three terms. Given this trend, there are only two ways to increase the number of women elected. If nothing else were to change, then mathematically in order to achieve the state-established target of a minimum of 35%-40% women in parliament, there would hypothetically need to be 51% women candidates on the ballot. But this is not a guarantee, as one of the respondents told us about a province where there were 60% women on the ballot and only 16% elected. Another possibility is to have women-only electoral districts or reserved seats for women, which is done in countries such as India, Bangladesh, Argentina and Rwanda, however this was not the preferred solution by the women interviewed. The other way to achieve the target is to improve the ratio of the number of women elected compared with the number on the ballot. This will require improving the quality of the women nominated, paying attention to their relative positioning on the ballot and their electoral district, and to improve their campaigning and networking capacity. There will also need to be a change in voting patterns among both women and men, which will require public education programs on gender awareness.

### 3.4.1 Electoral districts

As has been seen, the electoral district in which a candidate is placed is very important in determining whether she will be successful. While the province where a woman runs is decided at the central level, the district within the province is a decision of the local authorities. And the position of the candidate on the ballot is determined by local election councils. This gives local officials tremendous latitude, which can either benefit or preclude women depending on the political will at the local level. Therefore, one of the solutions proposed was that members of the local election councils should receive gender equality awareness training and include an exofficio slot for the Women's Union.

While the location of the constituency is important for all women, those who are younger or less well-known are at a particular disadvantage if they are not allowed to run in their home district:

*"If the Party is serious about electing women, they will place them in electoral districts where they are known. I was fortunate that I ran in a district where my university was located and there were a lot of young people, which was an advantage for me."*  
– retired MP

Even high-profile women can have difficulty if they are placed in a constituency where they are pitted against local men or even women who are well-known. In the interviews, there were constant references made regarding a powerful female incumbent who lost her re-election because she was

<sup>2</sup> There were 24 provinces with more than 40% women candidates, 16 provinces with 30-40% women candidates, and 23 provinces with under 30% women candidates. Provinces with high percentage of women candidates were Yen Bai (75%), Soc Trang (70%), Ba Ria - Vung Tau, Kon Tum, Lam Dong, Ninh Binh and Vinh Long (62,5%). The provinces with low percentage of women candidates were Binh Duong (10%), Quang Ninh, Quang Tri, and Thai Nguyen (12.5%).



placed in the wrong district. Almost none of the women interviewed who had been re-elected, represented the same district in each term, however most of them were in the same province and had wide networks. In Viet Nam, electoral districts are more administrative in function than in other countries where there may be a strong tradition of constituency representation.

### 3.4.2 Voting intentions and media coverage

Most of the women interviewed referred to “awareness” of the impact of declining Women’s political participation on society as a whole and of gender equality in general as being a major precondition to electing more women. This includes awareness of voters, of men in senior positions and of women themselves. The respondents stated that often women would not vote for other women. Another problem is the prevalence of proxy voting. This is where one member of the family – usually a man – will go and cast votes for the whole family. A recent study that looked at the reasons that people gave for their choice of candidates showed that the candidate’s career was by far the most important factor in voters’ evaluation of candidates, and that most of their information comes from mass media (PyD 2011). People vote based on familiar names and impressive resumes. As can be seen in the photo below, at the polling stations the names, photos and resumes of each candidate is placed on the wall for voters to refer to.



Photo of women reviewing CVs of candidates

The media coverage of candidates is heavily regulated, and candidates are given equal coverage on public networks and newspapers. Even so, there are some ways that women can gain profile. One of these is the Women’s Union newspaper whose main mandate is the promotion of women. The editor of one of these newspapers spoke about how much coverage they provided for women candidates:

*“Ho Chi Minh City has the highest number of women elected, my newspaper, the Women’s Union paper, did that. My paper promoted women well because it is in our mandate to do so. We printed their biographies, interviews with individuals, and profiles. Most newspapers don’t do this, even though they reach more readers. I appointed an individual reporter for each female candidate. If there was no room in the print edition, we posted it online.” – MP and newspaper editor*

Another female journalist who had been an editor of a major newspaper and the head of her local journalists association reflects on the coverage that she received during her campaign:

*“In general everyone is treated the same. It is very regulated. But in reality of course there are differences. Some nominees have a poor background and few activities and so they are not covered. In my election, because I was a journalist I expected that my friends might give me some preferred coverage. But I was upset through the whole campaign that they actually ignored me and did not mention me at all. It was only near the election that my colleagues started to write about me. They told me later they did it on purpose, because I would be the last one people remembered before voting so it was an advantage for me.” – retired MP*

Several respondents referred to their action plan when discussing the reasons for their electoral success. If the action plan was well drafted and related to the concerns of the local community, it could be an advantage to the candidate. This is why it is important for women to be placed in electoral districts where they are from, or at minimum to have the support of the local Women’s Union in writing their action plan. An example of an action plan can be found in Annex 6.

### 3.4.3 The ballot

Almost all the interviewed candidates spoke about the relative positioning of names on the ballot as the single most important factor in determining who is elected. Because there is no inter-party competition nor individual campaigning, the profile and qualifications of the candidate are the only differentiating factor for voters. Almost invariably, the candidate with the higher career position will be elected. If there are equally qualified men and women, the man will generally win. How a district’s

candidate list is drawn up may determine the outcome of the election to benefit the male or female candidates. The local election committees, in consultation with local Party and government officials, determines which candidates to pose against one another.

There are no quick fixes that apply in all cases. For example, some have suggested that there should always be one more female candidate than the number of seats, thereby ensuring that at least one of the women will be elected. However, this runs the risk of splitting the votes between women. Since candidates also need 50% of the vote to be elected this could backfire. In other cases, it was suggested that only one woman be placed on the ballot, as people will be inclined to vote for her out of political correctness. But this could also backfire, especially if the woman is not a strong candidate. What needs to be avoided is the case where there are several female candidates but all are pitted against one another in the same district which means that at most one will get elected. For the most part, the solution is that the local Women's Union should observe closely the structure of each ballot and insist on changes where it is evident that the odds are stacked against the women. This of course requires resolve on the part of the Women's Union and depends on how much the Women's Union's voice is heeded.

#### Examples of fictitious ballots where women are uncertain to be elected.

##### **Ballot # 1:**

5 candidates for 3 seats:

- Senior political official (male)
- Kindergarten teacher (female)
- Head of the local Farmers Union (male)
- Chief of police (male)
- Young ethnic minority student (female)

##### **Ballot #2:**

3 candidates for 2 seats:

- Incumbent MP from another part of the country (female)
- Chair of the local People's Council (male)
- Popular ethnic minority leader (in an area where that minority is populous) (male)

##### **Ballot #3:**

4 candidates for 2 seats:

- Vice director of a hospital (male)
- Vice director of a hospital (female)
- Head of a public enterprise (male)
- Vice-head of a government department (female)

#### Example of a fictitious ballot where women are more likely to be elected:

4 candidates for 3 seats:

- Director of a hospital (female)
- Head of a local Trade Union (female)
- Young businessman (male)
- Vice-head of a government department (male)

### 3.4.4 Preparation of candidates

During the interviews, there were numerous stories about women who beat the odds and were elected despite the fact that they were not the strongest candidate on the ballot. Or conversely, senior women who failed because of lack of preparation or a poor image. There are a number of organizations, including NGOs and the Women's Union, that provide training for both male and female candidates and for MPs. For the most part, the women who had gone through training programs conducted by the Women's Union or by other organizations found these useful:

*"I had only a couple of days to train, and I received a few tips. But without those tips I wouldn't be here, it's why I succeeded." – current female MP*

However most women agreed that real preparation cannot occur in only a few days before an election, but it must be a long-term process. Where there was criticism of the training, it was that it was not practical enough. Some solutions include asking more retired MPs or People's Council members conduct the training because they understand the practical requirements. Similarly, candidates who had the help of the local community or Women's Union in identifying issues of concern and developing their action plans were much more successful:

*"The role of the Women's Union is to ensure there are VIABLE female candidates; to help prepare their action plans, they must be convincing. Many succeed in the constituency based on the action plan. Some women won because their parents and in-laws worked on the action plan because they have experience. The Women's Union should also teach women how to promote themselves and how to do media."*  
– retired MP

The Women's Union was perceived as a potential enabler or an impediment. Their role is to identify and introduce candidates and to provide training, but in fact they can and should go much further than that and help the candidates to get elected.

### Case Study On Role Of Women's Union

*"The director of a cosmetics company was placed on the ballot in a rural district. Imagine her – with her Estee Lauder look and high heels – walking around talking to local peasants! There were 5 candidates and 3 could win. As members of the local Women's Union, we helped her with an action plan. She rehearsed her speeches in front of the Women's Union, we coached her on how to dress and speak in a way that would be understood by the local people, including her accent. We went with her to talk to constituents and accompanied her always. We'd listen to what people had to say – about her hair and dress – and give her immediate feedback before the next group meeting. She was up against the male Director of a postal station who was known in the district because of his postal delivery routes. What could she do to compete - she couldn't give him lipstick! She succeeded because of the Women's Union. We told her to campaign for microcredit, we advised her to go and be visible and where she should be."*

#### 3.4.5 Campaign period

Almost all those interviewed cited the short campaign period as an impediment to electing women, especially younger, inexperienced women who need time to develop a network and become known. The campaign is usually two months. The Election Commission is established 90 days beforehand, and the local election councils 80 days prior to the election. Often the negotiations over who will be a candidate continues even up until 10 days before the election. Even though most respondents told us they did not do direct campaigning to promote themselves (ie: door-to-door or shaking hands in shopping centres and public places), it does not mean that they cannot begin preparations early. Potential female candidates should be given training well before an election, and the best ones groomed and promoted by the Women's Union and other institutional actors.

*"We should start preparing for the 14<sup>th</sup> term now. Train a lot of women, early and you are left with the gems. Not all of them will become Ministers but society will benefit."*  
– retired MP

## 4. Responsibility – who can act?

### 4.1 Viet Nam Communist Party

The Communist Party has significant influence at the national, provincial and local levels. Many senior leaders within the National Assembly, People's Councils, Fatherland Front and other bodies responsible for election processes are also senior Communist Party officials who hold multiple positions. The key bodies in the Communist Party are the Politburo and the Central Committee. The Communist Party also plays a decisive role in personnel management of state bodies through the Party's Personnel Department.

## 4.2 Viet Nam Women's Union

The Women's Union is a mass organization that includes 12 million members in Viet Nam. It conducts meetings, disseminates information and participates in state structures to promote women and gender equality. The Women's Union has an automatic spot on the Fatherland Front and by law it must be consulted prior to an election regarding the target for women's representation. It is responsible for identification and monitoring (negotiating) and training of female candidates. The Women's Union plan for enhancing Women's representation includes the following priorities:

1. Awareness-raising
2. Policy innovation
3. Capacity building
4. Gender forums and networking

The Women's Union (VWU) has the mandate and the capacity to prioritize women's leadership and election. Many of the women we interviewed told us that where the local Women's Union was active, they attribute their electoral success to this. As a broad-based mass movement, the VWU has the potential to act as a clearing-house for information and success stories, and to disseminate the best practices across the country. It is also a very effective lobbying organization as it is present at all levels.

## 4.3 National Assembly

Within the National Assembly, there are a number of bodies that have the capacity to act on behalf of women's political leadership.

The **Standing Committee of the National Assembly** (SCNA) is the gatekeeper committee of the National Assembly and is very influential. It decides which incumbents will be put forward for re-election. The SCNA selects committee chairs and vice-chairs and reviews all legislation. It has the capacity to push for innovative election guidelines that would increase the number of women. The SCNA is also influential in working with the Party to establish the "structure" and criteria that the Fatherland Front sends to the provinces prior to each election. Therefore, the SCNA should use its authority to work proactively to elect more women.

The **Social Affairs Committee of the National Assembly** has the responsibility for gender issues. The committee also organizes training for female MPs after they are elected. While there is an Ethnic Council within the National Assembly, in the absence of a Women's Council, the Social Affairs committee should initiate gender-based analysis of legislation and try to propose amendments to Laws, which would improve women's representation.

The **Women's Parliamentary Group** has a formal structure, with a president, 6 vice-presidents and 10 standing members. It holds workshops and activities but is not as active as it could be. Membership is voluntary. Retired women MPs identify this body as having the potential to be the "engine" to promote other women. In addition, the women's parliamentary group could play a coordinating role in reaching out to retired female MPs to include them in advocacy, training and development of policies.

## 4.4 Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs and the National Committee for the Advancement of Women

The **Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs** (MOLISA) is the Ministry with responsibility for the gender equality machinery of government. MOLISA has the formal authority to oversee implementation of the National Strategy on Gender Equality. As such, it can encourage the National Assembly and People's Councils to ensure that women's participation in elected bodies is a priority within the national gender strategy. MOLISA can also allocate funds and ensure that the Gender equality mechanisms that are available are adequately funded. MOLISA is the actor that is in the best position to gather information and track implementation and statistics on gender representation. It is also the voice within the executive branch to advocate for women within other government departments. As such, the Ministry is one of the most important pillars in any strategy to enhance the number of women elected in Viet Nam.

The **National Committee for the Advancement of Women** used to be autonomous with a secretariat staffed by the Women's Union, but it now falls administratively under MOLISA. Most of the women interviewed said that it was more influential in the past. NCFAW organizes celebrations for

International Women's Day and conducts awareness campaigns. However, one reason for its lack of strength is that it does not have dedicated staff. There are focal points assigned from other departments, however these are not full-time and this is simply added to their regular work responsibilities. There is potential here for NCFAW to play a greater role, but only if it is allocated more resources and staff, and provided more autonomy.

#### **4.5 Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Planning and Investment**

The Ministry of Home Affairs is responsible for promotions within the public service. The Ministry of Planning and Investment also has a role in human resource planning. One of the key reasons that women are not successful in elections is because there are not enough women in the senior positions from which electoral candidates are drawn. Therefore, these Ministries have the potential to increase the number of qualified women in the potential pool of candidates, as well as improve their likelihood of electoral success, promoting more women to senior positions

#### **4.6 Fatherland Front**

The Fatherland Front is an umbrella group of mass organizations and special interest groups, including the Women's Union. It has the legal mandate over elections, especially at the local level. The Fatherland Front, following guidance from the Communist Party and the Standing Committee of the National Assembly, designs the criteria and "structure" of the election and communicates these guidelines to the provincial Fatherland Front organizations. The provincial and local Fatherland Front is the main actor with responsibility for overseeing and implementing the elections, including the vetting of candidates, organizing the meetings where candidates present themselves and coordinating the activities of the election councils. As such, the Fatherland Front is the single most important actor in guaranteeing the implementation of Resolution 11 (April 27, 2007) and ensuring that women are equally represented.

#### **4.7 Election commission and provincial election councils**

At the National level the Election Commission, which is established 90 days before the election, has overarching responsibility for the logistics of election management, and is responsible for reporting the election results to the National Assembly. At the provincial and local levels, there are Election Councils that carry out the actual management of the election. This includes designing each ballot, including how many names are on the ballot in an electoral district for how many seats, and in which district candidates will run (with guidance from the provincial People's Council, People's Committees, Communist party and Fatherland Front). The Election Councils are established 80 days before the election date.

#### **4.8 Social Organizations**

There are an increasing number of domestic Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that are taking on responsibility for training of women candidates, public awareness and information programs on gender equality and advocacy. These NGOs often work in association with international organizations and with funding from international donors. They also work closely with the Women's Union and government bodies. The activities of such social organizations complements the work of the Ministries and other State bodies, and should be encouraged. Often they are able to reach people in unique ways and at levels that are more difficult for larger government agencies. By working together with women political aspirants and senior government officials, these NGOs also play a role in promoting networking for women.

### **5. Recommendations – What can be done?**

This section outlines broad recommendations followed by specific suggestions, or action items, which could enhance women's representation in Viet Nam. For a list of suggestions grouped by the institution that is responsible for implementing it, see Annex 3.

#### **5.1 Broad recommendations**

##### **5.1.1 Awareness-raising**

Much of the progress of women depends on social attitudes and political will, which first requires awareness. The first step is to recognize that there is a problem, and that without action, the decrease



in the number of women representatives could have a negative impact on Viet Nam's further economic and human development. Next, there should be gender awareness programs targeted at men in high (gatekeeper) positions, government institutions, and women themselves. Until women stop self-restraining and accepting patriarchal social norms, there will be no significant change.

### **5.1.2 Accountability, responsibility and oversight**

The legal framework is strong however it requires clear guidelines with specific targets, identification of persons responsible for meeting them, and sanctions for failure. There should be ongoing tracking of data, regular debriefings after each election to discuss what worked and what didn't, and a clear division of responsibilities with monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

### **5.1.3 Quality and number of candidates**

The best way to ensure more women will be elected is to enhance the number and quality of female candidates. This means promoting more women to the feeder positions from which electoral candidates are drawn, and providing training and support to women to encourage advancement in their careers. Secondly, the placement of women on the ballot and the selection of which district they will run in can set them up for failure or ensure their success. There should be incentives and penalties for government bodies that will ensure that women are positioned in places where they have a good chance of winning. Finally, the "structure" should, where appropriate, give more flexibility to local authorities and women should not always be combined with other "quota" groups, such as youth and ethnic minorities.

### **5.1.4 End Age discrimination**

It is an anomaly for a middle income country to have different ages of retirement for men and women. There should be no age differential in law for men and women. Men and women should have the choice, within a specific range, of what age to retire. Research on age discrimination has already been conducted. However, there should be a comprehensive review of this problem that identifies why the retirement age has not been changed yet, who is responsible, and how to implement the change effectively.

## **5.2 List of Suggestions**

*Practical action items to enhance women's representation in Viet Nam, by subject area:*

### **5.2.1 Policy-making and implementation**

- The policy framework should assign specific numerical targets, with time frames, sanctions and identified groups responsible for meeting them.
- The Communist Party should supervise more closely the compliance with resolution No 11 (April 27, 2007) at the national, provincial and local levels. There should be more guidance and monitoring of provincial and local levels about implementation of policies.
- The Communist Party should conduct an evaluation every 5 years regarding implementation of Resolution No 11 (April 27, 2007) and provide recommendations for achieving the targets in the next election.
- MOLISA should monitor other government Ministries for compliance with the National Strategy on Gender Equality and make constructive recommendations to other departments where improvement is needed.
- MOLISA should allocate adequate funding to ensure that the National Strategy on Gender Equality can be implemented fully.
- The Viet Nam Women's Union (VWU) should work with Party leadership, and leaders of the National Assembly and the People's Councils and People's Committees to monitor implementation of the National Gender Law, policies and strategies.
- In keeping with its oversight mandate, the VWU should conduct an investigation in each locality where women are under-represented, and determine why this is happening. If it is because of lack of guidance the VWU will work with relevant government bodies to develop more clear and specific instructions on implementation of laws. Where there is no political will to comply with laws and regulations the VWU will push for sanctions and publicize the lack of commitment in order to embarrass the locality into taking more proactive measures.

- The VWU should monitor national laws and regulations to ensure that any changes will not negatively impact women's representation and advocate for positive changes to the legal and policy framework.
- MOLISA should take a leadership role in encouraging the National Assembly, People's Councils and related bodies to put a priority on enhancing women's representation.

### **5.2.2 Women's Career Advancement**

- There should be more women promoted to senior Communist Party positions, particularly women who have a track record of defending women's equality, and in positions with influence and responsibility related to promotion of female representation in political and public life.
- There should be at least one woman in the leadership of the Personnel Department of the Communist Party.
- Include more women in senior Party and government positions from which centrally seconded candidates are drawn, including the Politburo and the Central Committee.
- The Standing Committee of the National Assembly should promote more women as chairs and vice-chairs of parliamentary committees.
- Promote/elect more women to senior management positions in the public sector and to chair and vice-chair positions in People's Committees and People's Councils.
- Eliminate the gender differential in the retirement age and allow both men and women to choose their age of retirement within a specific age range. Include exceptions for early retirement for those working in hard labour.
- Provide equal opportunities for training, scholarships and promotions for women and men, regardless of age.
- Include more women in positions that are "planned" for senior management posts.
- Eliminate discrimination based on time taken out for maternity and child rearing.
- Put promising women into positions that provide learning opportunities. For instance, the local Electoral Council could hire more women, or there could be positions in the office of the local People's Council where women could watch and develop their skills.

### **5.2.3 Social and Family Life**

- Make it easier for women with families to be in parliament. This could include a budget for return travel to their home constituency, combining meetings so that less travel is required, providing assistants and office support to part-time MPs, avoiding scheduling meeting when children are home from school holidays, etc.
- Provide orientation and information (webinars, pamphlets) for spouses and families of MPs to enhance understanding of the nature of their responsibilities, the importance of their role to society and how they can support them. The Women's Union could provide practical support to part-time female MPs while they attend the sessions of the National Assembly in Ha Noi.

### **5.2.4 Training**

- The VWU should continue to provide practical, skills-related training to women that will enhance their networking skills and self-confidence. Such training should begin years in advance with particular emphasis on skills such as public speaking, negotiation, how to conduct media interviews, and coaching on how to create a positive public image.
- Retired MPs and Members of the People's Councils should provide input into the training programs to ensure that they reflect the real needs of female candidates and representatives.
- Identify potential female candidates well ahead of time and start training them early.
- Train female candidates to use social media as a campaign tool.
- The Social Affairs committee should work with the women's parliamentary group to continue providing training and orientation for new female MPs, and expand that training where appropriate.

### **5.2.5 Networking and Mentorship**

- Establish a coaching and mentoring system by matching women who have the potential and aspiration to be in elected office with experienced women and men (including retired MPs). Such mentorship should be organized through the VWU and begin several years before an election. For the next election, the VWU should start now. The coaching should continue once women are elected to Parliament and when they stand for re-election.

- Provide networking opportunities for women, where they can meet formally and informally with key political leaders and influential people who could assist them in their careers. Before each event, provide training and coaching for the participants about how to network and present themselves.
- The National Women's Union should ask the provincial and district-level Viet Nam Women's Unions to share examples of success stories and develop a model of how local VWU can establish support networks that identify and support women.
- The MP Training Center of the National Assembly can play a productive role in coaching potential candidates.
- At the local level, the VWU should establish networks of influential women who will be tasked with identifying and promoting women for leadership roles. They will also encourage women to support one another and build networks of cooperation between women in different institutions.
- The VWU should reach out to other mass movements, such as Trade Unions and the Youth Union, to encourage them to provide opportunities for women to gain leadership experience and opportunities and to identify capable women.
- The local VWU can assist women who are nominated to understand local issues and work with them on developing an action plan that will resonate with local populations.
- At the local level, the VWU can attend public meetings with female candidates to provide feedback, and allow female candidates to rehearse their speeches in front of small groups of women to gain confidence.

### **5.2.6 Make Parliament More Enticing to Women**

- Decrease the number of part-time members in the National Assembly.
- Decrease the number of members of the executive branch who sit in parliament or remove them from their executive branch position while sitting in parliament.
- In order to motivate more women to enter politics, continue to provide MPs with greater capacity to review and amend legislation, to provide input on issues that matter to their constituents, and to ask questions and access the information needed to perform effective oversight of the government.
- The Standing Committee of the National Assembly should refer more legislation to the Social Affairs committee for review, especially for a gender-based analysis of proposed laws and the impact on levels of women's representation.

### **5.2.7 Public Education**

- Work with social organizations to create public education programs that counteract the patriarchal view of family life and stereotypes about women's abilities to be political leaders. Such programs should raise gender awareness for the general public and include an intensive awareness raising campaign in the lead-up to the 2016 election of the positive impact of women leaders. Encourage the public to support women in their families, workplace and community who seek to become public representatives.
- Use media opportunities available to women, such as the Women's Union newspapers and mainstream mass media (especially TV and radio) to promote women candidates. The VWU newspapers should provide information to promote female candidates not only during election campaigns, but to profile women who are successful even between elections.

### **5.2.8 Research**

- MOLISA should implement a broad data-tracking strategy that would collect and collate all the statistics regarding women's participation, and conduct an analysis of the numerical trends to identify weak areas that need further improvement.
- Conduct a baseline assessment of women's leadership throughout the political system from the national to provincial to local levels, in order to identify areas of strength and weakness, and build networks for sharing of information.
- Conduct a study on comparative legal frameworks from other countries for election financing and spending limits on electoral campaigns.
- The women's parliamentary group, together with international NGOs and donors, should conduct an international comparative study on the day-to-day functioning of intra-party women's parliamentary groups and develop a program with international partners for study visits and/or knowledge-sharing with other countries about how such groups gain influence.



### 5.2.9 Election Process

- The Women's Union should have an ex officio spot on all local election councils, and the make-up of the election councils should aim for parity between men and women.
- When the Fatherland Front sends the criteria (structure) for candidates to the provinces, rather than specifying exactly that a public enterprise or university or Union is to be represented, they should give more flexibility by suggesting percentages and areas/fields (i.e.: 20% from business). This will allow the local authorities more flexibility in finding the qualified women, rather than limiting the search to those women who also happen to fit the rest of the structural criteria but may not be the most qualified.
- The VWU should use its ex officio position on the Fatherland Front to influence the electoral process in order to make it more equal for women.
- Begin the election process earlier to allow women more time to prepare.
- The Standing Committee of the National Assembly should use its influence to propose guidelines and changes to the "structure" which would result in the election of more women.
- The Election Commission should develop a strategy and send guidelines to the Election Councils regarding achievement of the 35-40% target for the next election.
- Produce and disseminate training and awareness raising material on the women's representation targets set in the National Strategy on Gender Equality for Provincial People's Councils and Election Councils. Such materials should include stories of successful female candidacies and of effective contributions by female MPs from diverse backgrounds. The members of Election Councils should have compulsory training on gender awareness and understand the Gender Equality Law, Resolution 11, the National Strategy on Gender Equality and other policies that impact women's representation.

### 5.2.10 Criteria for Candidates

- Select more representatives from fields where women have a strong presence – such as education, but also seek women who are in non-traditional fields of expertise.
- The Standing Committee of the National Assembly should propose more female incumbents to be put forward for re-election.
- Seek out skilled, knowledgeable women to run as self-nominated candidates and provide support to them to understand the political system, structures and election process.

### 5.2.11 Formation of the Ballot

- The VWU should monitor the development of the ballot at the local level and make active suggestions for changes where it is evident that women are not as likely to be elected based on the structure of the ballot.
- Ensure that the target of a minimum of 35%-40% elected women is heeded in the development of the ballot.
- Ensure that women who are on the ballot have high levels of seniority in their occupation.
- The Fatherland Front should be careful that there are enough spots for women that they are not always forced to combine women with other quota groups – such as youth and ethnic minorities. Otherwise it creates over-representation of female youth and female minorities to the detriment of women who do not fit these categories, and this could reduce the seniority of women elected.
- Place female incumbents and centrally seconded candidates in electoral districts where they are well known, have a network and are familiar with the issues.

### 5.2.12 Coordination and Advocacy

- MOLISA should act as a coordinating body for all the actors related to Women's political participation.
- The VWU should work with the women's parliamentary group, the NCFAW, MOLISA, the Social Affairs Committee of the National Assembly and other gender machinery mechanisms to ensure cross-fertilization of information and coordination of activities.
- NCFAW should be more independent again with full-time dedicated staff and proper resources.
- The Social Affairs committee and women's parliamentary group should work together to coordinate the activity of women representatives, to conduct advocacy on behalf of women's leadership and provide training opportunities for female MPs.

- A group should be established of retired women MPs to advocate policies and make recommendations regarding enhancing women's representation.
- The Vietnamese government at the national and provincial/local levels should develop a strategy for cooperation and coordination between local women's advocacy NGOs.
- Local NGOs should recognize that the level of women's representation directly impacts other indicators for women, such as health and education, and should therefore prioritize this within their programs.
- NGOs should work with the Women's Union and other bodies to avoid duplication in training and public awareness campaigns.

## 6. Conclusion

The declining number of women in the National Assembly is a disconcerting trend that runs counter to Viet Nam's progress in other areas and threatens its development. Women's political representation is a strong indicator of progress toward the MDGs. The recent decline is not consistent with the Vietnamese constitution, laws, stated objectives and socialist principles. Without immediate action, there is a risk that the decline of the past decade could turn into a trend that will be much more difficult to reverse. However, there is a strong basis from which to work, including a powerful cadre of women leaders, a broad network with the mandate and capacity to take on the challenge (Women's Union), political will at the highest levels, and strong legal and policy frameworks to build on. In addition, the number of women in leadership positions at the provincial and local levels is holding steady – even increasing slightly – so there is a good foundation there. In fact the declining numbers in the National Assembly are an aberration compared with other trends in society, and with recognition of the problem and strong political action now this could be reversed and Viet Nam could return to its previous position as a leader in the world on gender equality and women's representation.

## ANNEX 1 – Scope of Project, Research Questions and Methodology

### Scope of Study

The study covers women in politics at the level of the National Assembly of Viet Nam, with a particular focus on the process for selection, nomination and election of candidates. Local levels of government, including the provincial, commune and district People's Councils are addressed in the context of pathways to women's success in political leadership, but are outside the scope of the study in itself.

For the purpose of this study, "politics" is defined in terms of elected representatives. As many female leaders wear several "hats" - i.e.: their career paths include leadership in Unions, the Administration, the Communist Party as well as electoral politics, the study secondarily addresses women's leadership in these areas. However this is done in the context of women's career paths.

While women's leadership roles in social organizations, unions, the Communist Party and the Executive branch are not directly within the scope of the research, these are addressed in terms of the enabling environment for women who seek elected office.

The study covers the 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> National Assemblies (2002 through 2012).

The core of the study is focused on the paths of women, from aspirant to nominee to candidate to elected representative. To supplement quantitative data, the study relies on case studies and interviews with women at each stage in the process, as well as the Women's Union, the Fatherland Front, Women's leadership academies and others who have a role in the process of identification, training, selection and nomination of women leaders.

The study concludes with recommendations for improvement of procedures and the enabling environment in order to increase the number and quality of women as elected representatives in Viet Nam. The recommendations were subject to a feedback session and peer review by a selected group of retired or former female legislators, the Women's Union and representatives from UNDP and its partners.

### Research Questions

#### Main question:

Why is the number of women in elected positions going down at the same time that Viet Nam is modernizing and its living standards are rising?

#### Sub-questions:

- What are the targets/quotas for women in politics and why aren't they being met?
- What is the process for identification, selection, nomination and geographic placement of candidates and how does this impact the number of women who succeed?
- Are female candidates being given the preparation that they need to run successful campaigns?
- What is the impact of the socio-cultural environment on women's success and how can this be improved?

### Methodology

#### Literature Review

The research relies on secondary sources as part of the literature review, including publications of international and national organizations regarding women's political participation in Viet Nam, newspaper articles during the period 2002-2011, and officially published materials. The legal and policy framework is reviewed based on constitutional and legal documents available in the public domain.

#### Interviews

Case studies and qualitative data were gathered through interviews. In most cases, both the international and national consultants conducted interviews, however in some politically sensitive cases the national expert conducted interviews alone in Vietnamese. The interview candidates were selected based on recommendations from the national consultant, the *Empowerment of Women in the Public Sector of Viet Nam* (EOWP) project staff, as well as recommendations from retired members of

parliament and organizations working with women. The interviewees were selected to ensure as broad a variety of backgrounds as possible. Interviews were also conducted with those who could provide information about processes and social/political context. The case studies were chosen after the interviews were completed, based on the most compelling and representative stories.

#### Feedback session

Following the completion of the interviews, but before the drafting of the report, there was a feedback session to discuss proposed recommendations and to provide advice on the structure and content of the final report. This session was held on May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2012. A peer review was also conducted including women's representatives in Viet Nam, the Women's Union and UN experts.

## ANNEX 2 - List of Interviews and Questions

### List of people interviewed

Family name	Name	Title and position
Ms. Phạm Thị Vân	Lan	Former MP, Term XI (full time)
Mr. Nguyễn Thanh	Quang	Head of Da Nang city Fatherland Front
Ms. Đỗ thị Kim	Lĩnh	Head of Women's Union of Da Nang city
Ms. Nguyễn Thị	Kiều	Head of Commission of Popularization and Education of the Centre
Ms. Nguyễn Thị	Nhung	Chair of Women's Union (Khanh Hoa province), MP, Part time member of Committee of National Defense in the National Assembly
Mr. Mellor	Robert	Consultant, Policy and Capacity Building Advisor, Former Senior Technical Advisor to the Viet Nam National Assembly
Ms. Tôn Nữ Thị	Ninh	Former MP, Term XI.
Ms. Vũ Ngọc	Thủy	Deputy Director of Gender Equality Department, MOLISA
Ms. Dương thị	Xuân	Dean of Department of legal and policy - National Women's Union
Ms. Trần Thị	Lan	Dean of personnel Department of National Women's Union
Ms. Nguyễn Thúy	Anh	MP and Vice Chair, Social Affairs Committee of the National Assembly
Ms. Ngô Thị	Minh	MP - Vice Chair, National Assembly Committee on culture, education, youth and children
Mr. Nguyễn Văn	Pha	Vice-head of Fatherland Front
Ms. Nguyễn Thị	Kỳ	Former Director, Training Center for Members of the National Assembly
Ms. Bùi Thị	An	MP, term XIII
Ms. Vương Thị	Hanh	Director, Center for Education Promotion and Empowerment of women
Ms. Nguyễn Thị Hằng	Nga	Former Editor-in-Chief, The Worker's Newspaper, Head of Journalist Association of Ho Chi Minh city, Former MP term XI
Ms. Nguyễn Thị Hoài	Thu	Former Chair, Social Affairs Committee, National Assembly, Former MP, terms VI-XI
Ms. Nguyễn Thị Hồng	Đào	Former Vice Director of Foreign Affairs Department of An Giang, Former MP Term XI
Ms. Phạm Phương	Thảo	Former Chair, HCMC People's Council, Former MP Terms XI-XII
Mr. Vũ Tuấn	Minh	Senior Program Officer, UNDP Policy Division
Ms. Vũ Phương	Trà	Program Analyst, UNDP
Mr. Fuelner	Frank	UNDP Parliamentary Advisor

## Interview questions<sup>3</sup>

### **Questions for female candidates and representatives**

1. Why did you decide to seek elected office?
  - a. Who initially spoke to you about running for election?
  - b. Why do you think they approached you?
  - c. Did you express to others that you wanted to be an elected representative?
  - d. Was being a member of the Party important in you being selected as a potential candidate?
  - e. Do you also represent other minority groups such as youth, ethnic minority, religious group? Was that an important factor in considering you for nomination?
2. What is your professional background and how did this help you as an elected representative?
3. Please describe the process that you went through to get elected?
  - a. Can you walk us through the different steps to be elected?
  - b. Do you think this process is different for some people? If so, how is it different?
4. How did you learn about the steps needed to run in the election?
5. What part of the nomination and election process did you find the most difficult?
6. What part did you find the easiest?
7. Did you have the encouragement of your family?
8. Did you have the encouragement of other women?
9. Did you receive any training to prepare you for running as a candidate? Was it useful and, if so, how?
10. What other support were you provided once you were identified as a candidate?
11. How did you conduct your campaign? How did this differ from other candidates? From other male candidates?
12. How many candidates were on the ballot? How were the different candidates selected? How many other women were you running against? How many were successful?
13. Do you represent any other targeted groups such as religious groups, ethnic minority, youth etc.? Was this one of the determinants for selecting you as a candidate?
14. Did you choose which constituency to run in? Did you represent a constituency where you lived? If not, how did the local community perceive you?
15. Did you work with other women on specific issues in the National Assembly?
16. Do you feel that you achieved what you set out to do as an elected representative? If not, why not?
17. What would you tell a younger woman entering politics that you wish you had known?
18. Why do you think the number of women being elected is going down in Viet Nam?
19. What recommendations would you make to increase the number of women elected in the future?
20. Do you have any further comments that you would like to see in this report?

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<sup>3</sup> Not every respondent was asked all of these questions, the interviews were tailored for the specific individual.

**Questions for all interviewees**

1. What is your current role and function and that of your organization?
2. Are women encouraged to seek public office? Whose responsibility is this?
  - a. What are the procedures and policies that are in place to encourage women in leadership positions?
  - b. Are these procedures available for the public?
  - c. If so, where or how do you access this information?
3. What institutions are the main actors involved in identifying potential women candidates, negotiating to have these women on the ballot, supporting the women to be elected?
  - a. How are potential political candidates recruited? By whom?
  - b. What are the usual pre-requisites to become a political candidate?
  - c. What is the process to be nominated?
  - d. How is it determined which constituency a candidate will run in?
  - e. Who determines how many people run in a constituency and how many women are among them?
  - f. Who manages the balance between different quota groups (i.e. ethnic minorities, youth, regions)
4. How is the election board made up (who decides), how many people are on it, what is the criteria for selection, and how many men/women are on the board?
5. What targets or quotas exist to ensure that women have fair representation?
  - a. What are the targets for the number of women nominated?
  - b. Are there a minimum number of women to run in a given constituency?
  - c. Are there (or should there be) quotas/reserved seats for the number of women actually elected?
6. When a talented woman is identified, what kind of leadership training is accessible to her?
  - a. What is the curriculum?
  - b. What other support is she provided?
  - c. By which institution?
7. Is there currently a strong pool of capable and qualified women to draw candidates from?
8. Do women mentor or provide role models to other women?
9. Are there any public campaigns of civic education to sensitize voters about the need to elect women? If so – by whom? Is it effective?
10. Why do you think the number of women elected to the National Assembly in Viet Nam is going down?

## ANNEX 3 – Mandates and Suggestions for Institutional Actors

### Viet Nam Communist Party

#### **Mandate:**

The Viet Nam Constitution (1980) states that the Communist Party is "*the only force leading the state and society and the main factor determining all successes of the Vietnamese revolution.*" The Party's role is primary in all state activities, overriding that of the government, which functions to implement Party policies. The Party maintains control by filling key positions in all government agencies with party leaders or the most trusted party cadres and by controlling all mass organizations. Citizens belong to mass organizations appropriate to their status, such as the quasi-governmental Viet Nam Fatherland Front, the Viet Nam General Confederation of Trade Unions, or the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth League. Party cadres leading such organizations educate and mobilize the masses through regular study sessions to implement Party policies.

#### **Suggestions:**

- Include more women in senior Party and government positions from which centrally seconded candidates are drawn, including the Politburo and the Central Committee.
- There should be at least one woman in the leadership of the Personnel Department of the Communist Party.
- Appoint more women who have a record of promoting gender equality to the bodies that identify and recruit candidates, including the Standing Committee of the National Assembly.
- The Communist Party should supervise more closely the compliance with Resolution No 11 (April 27, 2007) at the national, provincial and local levels. The Party should conduct an evaluation every 5 years regarding implementation of Resolution No 11 (April 27, 2007) and provide recommendations for achieving the targets in the next election.

### Viet Nam Women's Union

#### **Mandate:**

The Viet Nam Women's Union (VWU) was founded on October 20th, 1930. It is a mass organization representing all strata of women throughout the country. From its outset, the Union has encouraged women to participate in the cause of national defense, construction and development. The VWU works for the equality and advancement of women, along with protecting the legitimate legal rights and interests of women. The VWU's short-term objectives are to encourage all strata of women to tap the potential, creativity and fine qualities of Vietnamese women to accelerate national industrialization and modernization.

The history of VWU is closely attached to the country's history for national independence and development. VWU has a network that operates throughout Viet Nam at four administrative levels (central, provincial, district and commune) with a total membership of more than 13 million women belonging to 10,472 local women's unions in communes and towns throughout the country. Since its foundation, VWU has transformed and developed as an organization that is mandated to protect women's legitimate rights and strive for gender equality. VWU is divided into 4 levels, comprising the Central level, the Provincial and Municipal level (63 units), the District level (642 units), and the Commune level (10,472 units). The VWU is a Member of the Fatherland Front, a leader within the Party, and it is publicly funded.

#### **Suggestions:**

- Conduct a baseline assessment of women's leadership throughout the political system from the national to provincial to local levels, in order to identify areas of strength and weakness, and build networks for sharing of information.
- Where women have been more successful than average, identify strategies used by the local VWU and provide these best practices as guidance across the country.
- Establish a coaching and mentoring system by matching women who have the potential and aspiration to be in elected office with experienced women and men. Such mentorship should be organized through the VWU and begin several years before an election. For the next election, the VWU should start now. The coaching should continue once women are elected to Parliament and when they stand for re-election.



- Provide networking opportunities for women, where they can meet formally and informally with key political leaders and influential people who could assist them in their careers. Before each event, provide training and coaching for the participants about how to network and present themselves.
- At the local level, the VWU should establish networks of influential women who will be tasked with identifying and promoting women for leadership roles. They will also encourage women to support one another and build networks of cooperation between women in different institutions.
- The VWU should reach out to other mass movements, such as Trade Unions and the Youth Union, to encourage them to provide opportunities for women to gain leadership experience and opportunities and to identify capable women.
- The VWU newspapers should provide information to promote female candidates not only during election campaigns, but to profile women who are successful even between elections.
- The National VWU should work with the women's parliamentary group, the NCFAW, MOLISA, the Social Affairs Committee of the National Assembly and other gender machinery mechanisms to ensure cross-fertilization of information and coordination of activities.
- The VWU should use its ex officio position on the Fatherland Front to influence the electoral process in order to make it more equal for women.
- The VWU should monitor the development of the ballot at the local level and make active suggestions for changes where it is evident that women are not as likely to be elected based on the structure of the ballot.
- The VWU should continue to provide training for female candidates, but begin the process years in advance with particular emphasis on skills such as public speaking, negotiation, how to do media interviews, social media and coaching on how to create a positive public image.
- The VWU should establish public awareness programs that emphasize the benefits to society of having women in elected positions and encourage the public to support women in their families, workplace and community who seek to become public representatives.
- The local VWU can assist women who are nominated to understand local issues and work with them on developing an action plan that will resonate with local populations.
- At the local level, the VWU can attend public meetings with female candidates to provide feedback, and allow female candidates to rehearse their speeches in front of small groups of women to gain confidence.
- The VWU should work with Communist Party leadership, and leaders of the National Assembly and the People's Councils and People's Committees to monitor implementation of the National Gender Law, policies and strategies.
- In keeping with its oversight mandate, the VWU should conduct an investigation in each locality where women are under-represented, and determine why this is happening. If it is because of lack of guidance the VWU will work with relevant government bodies to develop more clear and specific instructions on implementation of laws. Where there is no political will to comply with laws and regulations the VWU will push for sanctions and publicize the lack of commitment in order to embarrass the locality into taking more proactive measures.
- The VWU should monitor national laws and regulations to ensure that any changes will not negatively impact women's representation and advocate for positive changes to the legal and policy framework.

## **The National Assembly (Parliament)**

### ***Mandate:***

The National Assembly of Viet Nam (Parliament) is the highest body under the constitution. The Standing Committee of the National Assembly (SCNA) is the main decision-making body in the parliament. It has the responsibility for selecting the chairs and vice-chairs of all other parliamentary committees and deciding which incumbents will be put forward for re-election. The SCNA is also influential in working with the Party to establish the "structure" and criteria that the Fatherland Front sends to the provinces prior to each election for the nomination of candidates.

There are several other committees in the National Assembly:

1. Committee of Laws;
2. Committee of Justice;
3. Committee of Economy;
4. Committee of Financial and Budget Affairs;
5. Committee of National Defense and Security;
6. Committee of Culture, Education, Adolescents and Children's Affairs;
7. Committee of Social Affairs;
8. Committee of Science, Technology and Environment; and

## 9. Committee of External Relations.

The Social Affairs Committee of the National Assembly is the one with the most direct responsibility for women's advancement and representation. The Social Affairs committee is responsible for the following:

- Verify bills and recommend laws, legal projects and other projects related to the fields of social affairs.
- Supervise the implementation of laws, decrees, and resolutions of the National Assembly related to the fields of social affairs.
- Supervise the implementation of social policies, the nation's socio-economic development, and the budget related to this.
- Propose to the National Assembly solutions regarding current social affairs.

The Women's Parliamentary Group is a group of female Members of Parliament under the Viet Nam National Assembly's Committee for Social Affairs. On 15th May 2008, pursuant to the Resolution 620/2008/NQ-UBTVQH by the Standing Committee of the National Assembly, the Viet Nam Female Members of Parliament Group was established. It was re-established for the current parliamentary session on October 20, 2011 and it now has a membership of more than 100 female MPs on a voluntary basis. The goal is to create a forum where women have the opportunity to exchange, to share experiences in representative skills, as well as to identify lessons learned from international female parliamentary groups, and ultimately to improve the activities of the National Assembly. It creates a forum for female MPs to have a common voice in relevant activities of the National Assembly, at the same time to support the members to operate more effectively in their role of people's elected representatives.

Activities of the Viet Nam Women's Parliamentary Group include:

- Organizing workshops, conferences and informational discussions;
- Improving the knowledge of female MPs in related activities of the National Assembly, especially in ensuring gender equality;
- Mainstreaming gender in legislative procedures;
- Providing policy input on gender-related issues such as the prevention and control of domestic violence;
- Participating in multilateral and bilateral forums and working with international delegations of female Members of Parliament.

The Viet Nam Women's Parliamentary Group also participates in social affairs such as conducting visits to under-privileged families, sanatorium centers, and awarding scholarships to disabled students.

### **Suggestions:**

- The Standing Committee of the National Assembly (SCNA) should use its influence to propose guidelines and changes to the "structure" which would result in the election of more women.
- The SCNA should refer more legislation to the Social Affairs committee for review.
- The SCNA should promote more women as chairs and vice-chairs of committees.
- The SCNA should propose more women incumbents to be put forward for re-election.
- The Social Affairs committee should work with the women's parliamentary group to continue providing training and orientation for new female MPs, and expand that training where appropriate.
- The Social Affairs committee should review more legislation for gender-based analysis and the impact on levels of women's representation.
- The Social Affairs committee and women's parliamentary group should work together to coordinate the activity of women representatives, to conduct advocacy on behalf of women's leadership and provide training opportunities for female MPs.
- The women's parliamentary group, together with international NGOs and donors, should conduct an international comparative study on the day-to-day functioning of intra-party women's parliamentary groups and develop a program with international partners for study visits and/or knowledge-sharing with other countries about how such groups gain influence.
- A group should be established of retired women MPs to advocate policies and make recommendations regarding enhancing women's representation.

## **Viet Nam Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA)**

### ***Mandate:***

The Department of Gender Equality within MOLISA has the responsibility for overseeing implementation of the Action Plan on Gender Equality (2011-2015) by Ministries, branches and local governments. MOLISA supervises and synthesizes the results toward implementation of the targets and objectives of the National Strategy on Gender Equality (NSGE) 2011-2020. It also develops criteria to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the National Program on Gender Equality (NPGE) 2011-2015.

MOLISA achieves this through the following activities:

- Cooperates with the Ministry of Finance to formulate and promulgate the Circular providing guidance on the mechanisms for management and allocation of funds for the implementation of the NPGE for the period 2011–2015;
- Guides local governments regarding implementation of the projects assigned within the framework of the NPGE;
- Organizes an evaluation of the 5-year implementation of the Gender Equality Law
- Evaluates the 3-year implementation of Government Resolution No. 57/NQ-CP dated 1 December 2009 on the Government Programme of Action for the implementation of Resolution No. 11-NQ/TW dated 27 April 2007 of the Politburo on women's work in the period of accelerating industrialization and modernization of the country.
- Formulates and implements the plan for propagation and education on the Gender Equality Law;
- Guides and conducts the communication campaign on the occasion of the 5-year anniversary of the day when the Gender Equality Law became effective.
- Formulates and implements the plan for training and capacity building of officers in charge of gender equality and for the advancement of women of Ministries, branches and local governments.
- Develops a database on gender.

The National Committee for the Advancement of Women in Viet Nam (NCFAW) falls within the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) and is an interdisciplinary collaborative organization. Its functions are:

- Assist the Prime Minister in handling issues related to the advancement of women in the country.
- Study and propose to the Prime Minister directions and solutions to address issues related to the advancement of women.
- Assist the Prime Minister to coordinate between Ministries, ministerial-level agencies, agencies attached to the Government, the People's Committees at all levels and mass organizations to propagate, disseminate and mobilize people to implement Party policies and State laws relating to the advancement of women.
- Assist Prime Minister in urging Ministries, ministerial-level agencies, agencies attached to the Government, the People's Committees of provinces and cities under central authority for coordination to implement national targets for the advancement of women.
- Report to the Prime Minister every 6 months or as required about the operation of the National Committee for the Advancement of Women in Viet Nam.
- Perform other duties related to the advancement of women as requested by the Prime Minister.

### ***Suggestions:***

- MOLISA should take a leadership role in encouraging the National Assembly, People's Councils and related bodies to put a priority on enhancing women's representation.
- MOLISA should produce and disseminate training and awareness-raising material on women's representation targets set in the National Strategy on Gender Equality for Provincial People's Councils and Electoral Boards.
- MOLISA should monitor other government Ministries for compliance with the National Strategy on Gender Equality and make constructive recommendations to other departments where improvement is needed.
- MOLISA should allocate adequate funding to ensure that the National Strategy on Gender Equality can be implemented fully.
- NCFAW should be more independent again with full-time dedicated staff and proper resources.
- MOLISA should implement a broad data-tracking strategy that would collect and collate all the statistics regarding women's participation, and conduct an analysis of the numerical trends to identify weak areas that need further improvement.

- MOLISA should act as a coordinating body for all the actors related to Women's political participation.

## **Viet Nam Ministry of Home Affairs**

### ***Mandate:***

The Ministry of Home Affairs guides other ministries, branches, provinces and cities under central control to identify and arrange sufficient numbers of civil servants in charge of gender equality as laid down in the National Strategy on Gender Equality 2011–2020. The Ministry does this through the following activities:

- Developing and submitting to the Government for promulgation, guidance and implementation of the regulations on planning and forming sources of female cadres, and setting the proportion of women to be appointed for various positions in State agencies;
- Reviewing and making recommendations to competent agencies to amend, supplement, guide and expedite the regulation on the age range for appointing, training and fostering female cadres, civil servants and public employees;
- Assuming the management and implementation of the project on enhancing the capacity of female National Assembly deputies, female members of People's Councils at all levels, female managers, female leaders at all levels, female candidates for National Assembly elections, female candidates for People's Council elections at all levels for the legislative term 2016 – 2020, and female cadres destined for planning (Project 3) with the assigned activities;

### ***Suggestions:***

- Promote more women within state enterprises and public administration to senior levels.
- Include more women in positions that are "planned" for senior management posts.
- Provide equal opportunities for training, scholarships and promotions for women and men, regardless of age.
- Put promising women into positions that provide learning opportunities. For instance, the local Election Council could hire more women, or there could be positions in the office of the local People's Council where women could watch and develop their skills.
- Change the retirement age so that there is no differential between women and men, but so that there remains flexibility between those women who wish to retire early because they are in physically demanding jobs, and those professional women who wish to continue working.

## **Viet Nam Fatherland Front**

### ***Mandate***

The Viet Nam Fatherland Front is an umbrella group of pro-government "mass movements" in Viet Nam, and has close links to the Communist Party of Viet Nam and the Vietnamese government. It is an amalgamation of many smaller groups, including the Communist Party itself. As "the political base of people's power", it is intended to have a significant role in society, promoting "national solidarity" and "unity of mind in political and spiritual matters." Many of the government's social programs are conducted through the Fatherland Front.

The Fatherland Front is intended to supervise the activity of the government and of government organizations. Because the Front is based around mass participation and popular mobilization, it is seen as representative of the people, and both Viet Nam's constitution and laws give it a special role. The Front has a particularly significant role in elections. Specifically, endorsement by the Front is generally required (in practice, if not in theory) to be a candidate for election. Almost all candidates are nominated by (and members of) the Front, with only a few "self-nominated" candidates avoiding the Front's veto. The role of the Fatherland Front in electoral nominations is mandated by law.

### ***Suggestions:***

- When the Fatherland Front sends the criteria (structure) for candidates to the provinces, rather than specifying exactly whether a public enterprise or university or Union is to be represented, they should give more flexibility by suggesting percentages (i.e.: 20% from business). This will allow the local authorities more flexibility in finding the qualified women, rather than limiting the search to those women who also happen to fit the rest of the structural criteria but may not be the most qualified.
- The Fatherland Front should be careful that there are enough spots for women that they are not always forced to combine women with other quota groups – such as youth and ethnic minorities. Otherwise it creates over-representation of female youth and female minorities to

the detriment of women who do not fit these categories, and this could reduce the seniority of women elected.

- Select more representatives from fields where women have a strong presence – such as health, education, but also seek women who are in non-traditional fields of expertise.
- Place female incumbents and centrally seconded candidates into constituencies where they are familiar and have a network.
- Make the nomination process more transparent, especially for self-nominated candidates.
- Seek out skilled, knowledgeable women to run as self-nominated candidates and provide support to them to understand the political system, structures and election process.
- Ensure that nominated women candidates have the necessary skills and knowledge to be an effective MP.

## **National Election Commission and Provincial Election Councils**

### ***Mandate:***

The mandate of the Election Commission at the central level is to assume leadership over the organization of elections throughout the country and to control and direct the implementation of regulations set by law on the election of National Assembly deputies. The Election Committees in provinces and municipalities are responsible for issuing guidelines on the preparations for and organization of the election in each electoral district, and to control and direct the implementation of these guidelines by election boards and election teams. Election Boards manage the election in each electoral district and Election Teams run the election in each polling station (voting area).

### ***Suggestions:***

- The Election Commission should develop a strategy and send guidelines to the Election Councils regarding achievement of the 35-40% target of elected women for the next election.
- The Women's Union should have an ex officio spot on all local Election Councils, and the make-up of the Election Councils should aim for parity between men and women.
- The members of Election Councils should have compulsory training on gender awareness and understand the Gender Equality Law, Resolution 11, the National Strategy on Gender Equality and other policies that impact women's representation.
- The Election Councils should ensure that women who are on the ballot have high levels of seniority in their occupation and are known in the district.

## ANNEX 4 – Legal Framework

Title	Date	Main content
Constitution	Approved 1992, amended 2001	Chapter 5, Article 63: Male and female citizens have equal rights in all fields - political, economic, cultural, social, and the family. All acts of discrimination against women and all acts damaging women's dignity are strictly banned.
		Chapter 5, Article 54: The citizen, regardless of nationality, sex, social background, religious belief, cultural standard, occupation, time of residence, shall, upon reaching the age of eighteen, have the right to vote, and, upon reaching the age of twenty-one, have the right to stand for election to the National Assembly and the People's Councils in accordance with the provisions of the law.
Law on Elections of the National Assembly	Approved 1997, amended 2010	Chapter 1, Article 2: Citizens of the SRV, regardless of ethnic origin, sex, social component, faith, religion, educational level, occupation, and time of residence, if 18 years of age or more, have the right to vote, and if 21 years of age or more, have the right to run for election to the National Assembly in accordance with regulations set by law (stipulates women's right to elect and run for election as well as mechanisms to ensure women can exercise their rights.)
Law on Elections of the People's Councils, No12/2003 QH11/26/11/2003	Approved 2003, amended 2010	Chapter 2, Article 14: The standing committee of People's Council (at three levels: provincial, district, and commune) proposes the structure, composition and number of council delegates to be elected from political organizations, socio-political organizations, social organizations, People's armed forces, and local state organs at the same and lower level, in which it should guarantee that <i>ethnic minorities and women have an appropriate number of delegates</i> in local People's Councils.
Gender Equality Law No73/2006/QH11,	November 29, 2006, applied July 2007.	Chapter 2/ Article 11. Gender equality in the field of politics
		1. Men and women are equal in participating in state management and social activities.
		2. Men and women are equal in participating in the formulation and implementation of village codes, community regulations, agencies and organizations regulations.
		3. Men and women are equal in self-nominating as candidates or in nominating candidates to the National Assembly, People's Councils; and are equal in self-nominating as candidates and in nominating candidates to leading agencies of political organizations, socio-political organizations, socio-political and professional organizations, social organizations, socio-professional organizations.



		4. Men and women are equal in terms of professional qualifications and age when they are promoted or appointed to the same posts of management and leadership in agencies and organizations.
		5. Measures to promote gender equality in the field of politics include:
		a) To ensure the appropriate proportion of the National Assembly female members and People's Committees female members in accordance with the national gender equality goals.
		b) To ensure the appropriate proportion of women in appointing officials to hold titles in the professions in state agencies in accordance with the national gender equality goals.
Resolution No. 11-NQ/TW of the Politburo on women	April 27, 2007	By 2020, 25% of Party Committees, and 35-40% of delegates to the National Assembly and People's Councils are women. If 30% of officials of an organization are women, it must have one women leader in the organization. There should be an appropriate rate of women top-leaders in Party bodies, the National Assembly, and Cabinet according to the Law on Gender Equality.
		The rules of gender equality (no differences) between men and women must be followed regarding training and promotion ages.
Government Decision No.70/ND-CP - some guidance on implementation of the law on gender equality	June 4, 2008	Defines the responsibilities of government and its agencies regarding implementation of the Law on Gender Equality. The government is responsible for the whole, MOLISA is a key agency to coordinate (with other government agencies) to implement gender equality; at the local level, the People's Committees at three levels take responsibility to implement the Law on Gender Equality. The issues of gender equality comprise national & local gender equality programs, mainstreaming gender in legislative procedures, other programs, and supervising and synthesizing the results of implementing the targets and objectives of the Law on Gender Equality, reinforcing and innovating activities on communications and education of policies and laws on gender equality.
Government Resolution No. 57/NQ-CP - The Government Programme of Action for the implementation of Resolution No. 11-NQ/TW dated 27 April 2007 of the Politburo on women	July 1, 2009	Empowerment of women in all aspects of life through enhanced political participation of women, especially women's leadership and management. The rules of gender equality regarding training and promotion ages must be followed. Sets up the mechanism to ensure more women's participation in policy making processes and increases the rate of women MPs and women delegates in People's Councils at the three levels. Defines the accountabilities of executive agencies at both the national and local levels regarding the number of female government officers in State management.

Decision No. 48/2009/ND-CP dated May 19 2009 of the Government Prime Minister to issue the solutions to ensure the gender equality	May 19, 2009	Addresses communications and civic education on policies and laws on gender equality, mainstreaming gender in policymaking, other programs, providing support for women officials, and implementing gender equality practices in remote and poor areas.
Decision No. 56/2011/QĐ-TTg dated 14 October 2011 of the Government Prime Minister to issue the system of national gender statistical indicators.	October 14, 2011	To make assessments and report on national gender statistical indicators regularly, including the rate of women MPs, delegates of People's Councils (at three levels), leaders of Ministries, People's Committees (at three levels), and officers of the Party standing committees; Identify which agency will take responsibility to assess and report the indicators.
National Strategy on Gender Equality (NSGE) period 2011 - 2020		The target to raise the proportion of women in Party Committees in the 2011-2016 period to over 30 percent and to more than 35 percent in 2016-2020.
		By 2020, 95% of ministries, ministry-level agencies, governmental agencies, People's Committees at all levels and 100% of Party and State agencies and socio-political organizations are projected to have women holding key positions.
National Program on Gender Equality (NPGE) period 2011 - 2015 - Decision No 1241/ QĐ-ttg	July 22, 2011	One of the objectives of the program is capacity building for women, especially women leaders and representatives in the political system (including the National Assembly, local People's Councils, the Government at the national, provincial and local levels), and establishing sources of women leaders and representatives for the future. Main activities: Legal review, capacity assessments, survey research, training courses, networking forums.
Press release 11th Viet Nam National Women's Congress	March 14, 2012	More focus on legal/policy communication & dissemination and economic development activities, such as: 80% of women or more will be given by the Women's Union; 700,000 poor households headed by women will get loans and support from the VWU; communication on the stance of the Party, laws and policies of the State (no mention about women's political participation).

## ANNEX 5 – Procedures for Candidate Selection

Electoral Phase	Official Policy	Date	Procedures
Election preparation	The Directive No 50-CT of Politburo	Jan 5 2011	Guidance for National Assembly elections / not public
	The joint - resolution of NA Standing Committee and NFF No 01/2011	Jan 8 2011	Guidance of the negotiation process (more detail in 5 steps below)
	The resolution of National Assembly Standing Committee no 1020//2011/UBTVQH12	Jan 14 2011	Guidance of National Assembly election/ election campaign/ act 12: - Do not abuse authority in mass media management to conduct their own election campaign - Do not accept funding or donations for an election campaign from their own domestic or foreign organizations and individuals
Father land Front - negotiation	The process of negotiation/ issued with the Joint-resolution No 01 (above)		Do not use funding from property of the State, collectives and individuals to entice and buy voters
		<b>Term 13</b>	
Step1	To conduct the <b>First negotiation meeting</b> to make an agreement about the "structure", class, and number of nominated candidates	21/02-26/02	To make an agreement regarding the "structure", class, and number of nominations, and decide which organizations will be represented in the National Assembly based on the proposal (including the self nomination) of the Standing Committee of the National Assembly
			At the national level: the First meeting: (1) participants: Standing Committee of the National Fatherland Front (NFF), the members of NFF (including VWU), Election council, National Assembly Standing Committee (SCNA), and Government
			At the local level: The First meeting: (1) participants: Standing committee of Provincial Fatherland Front (PFF), the members of PFF (including PWU), representatives of District Fatherland Front (DFF), National Assembly election committee, Provincial People's Council, and People's Committees
Step 2	The organizations (approved after the first meeting) introduce their representatives to be the National Assembly (NA) nominations	04/3 - 16/03	The organizations propose names of candidates. The purpose is to gain trust and feedback within the organizations where the candidate works and to approve the nomination. The organization sends the CV of the nominee to the Election Committee.

Step 3	To conduct the <b>Second negotiation</b> meeting to agree on the first list of candidates	21-03-23/03	The meetings are conducted at the national and local levels to adjust the list of candidates in accordance with guidance from the SCNA, and with the feedback from the organizations where the nominees are working. The list of nominees is sent to the SCNA, Standing Committee of the Fatherland Front and Election committee.
Step 4	To conduct the local meeting to get feedback from voters in the location where the candidates are working or living	24/3-31/03	The meeting is conducted in the community where the nomination candidate is living regularly.
Step 5	To conduct the <b>third negotiation meeting</b> to finalize the final list of candidates	13/4-17/04	The third negotiation meeting is similar to the First, to finalize the final list of candidates.
Election campaign	The local Fatherland Front arranges the local meetings for candidates conducting their election campaigns. They monitor and supervise the campaign.		

## ANNEX 6 – Sample Action Plan

**Mdm Âu Thị Mai**, member of the ethnic committee of the National Assembly, deputy head of management division – the department of culture, sport and tourism – Tuyen Quang province  
(She won the election and became an MP during term XIII).

**Name:** Âu Thị Mai

**Date of birth:** 25/3/1978

**Ethnicity:** Sán Chay

**Born village:** Vân Sơn commune, Sơn Dương district, Tuyên Quang province

**Education:** Bachelors degree – subject: ethnic cultural management



Mdm. Âu Thị Mai, candidate

I feel greatly honoured to be nominated as a parliamentary candidate for the National Assembly (NA) in term 13, which would be a tremendous responsibility. I will improve my capacity and make a great effort to complete my duties and functions as a representative of the people, and meet the demands of voters who love and trust me. If I win the election, I will focus on the following activities:

- 1) I will keep in contact with people frequently, and listen and share their opinions, comments and recommendations, which I will discuss in the NA conferences, and pose questions to relevant government agencies. I will be active in NA debates. I will be close to voters before and after every NA conference, to ask for comments and provide feedback and information.
- 2) I will work closely with the Tuyen Quang NA group to conduct survey research, and make policy recommendations to the government on issues such as: vocational training; job creation, particularly in the ethnic, removed, and rural areas; capacity building and compensation policies for the local government in general, especially more focus on the commune government officers; health care for people who make a special contribution to the country and social affairs, or the poor, or those in a difficult family position. As an officer working in the affairs of culture, sport, and tourism, I would like to pay more attention to investment in cultural activities that can make comfortable spaces where the ethnic minorities, especially children, youth, and the elderly, can create and exchange cultural activities and play sports; I will establish policies to safeguard the traditional culture of local ethnic groups; and investment policies for tourism development.
- 3) As an ethnic minority, who was born in a poor, rural area, I can use my work experience to cooperate with the provincial NA group to propose investment policies for the ethnic minorities in rural areas to improve their living standards, particularly with a greater focus on rural infrastructure such as transport, irrigation, electricity, school, health care, etc.
- 4) As a women candidate, I will take responsibility for the rights of women and children, especially ethnic women who are living in the removed, mountain areas. The most important thing for them is to promote gender equality in all aspects of life. Policy recommendations should include job training and job creation in the rural districts, so they do not have to leave their villages and family to find jobs, which could have a negative impact on their family and children. My other concerns include a law on child protection - I will participate actively to ensure that all children will be cared for in the best conditions and environment.

## ANNEX 7 – Glossary of Terms

**Aspirant:** An individual who is qualified and interested in running for elected office but who has not yet taken any steps toward seeking election.

**Candidate:** An individual whose name is on a ballot in an election.

**CEDAW:** Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1979.

**Centrally seconded candidates:** Electoral candidates whose name was proposed by the national level instead of nominated by a local organization.

**Doi Moi:** Economic reforms initiated in 1986 which permitted privately owned companies in commodity production and abandoned efforts to collectivize industrial and agricultural sectors.

**Election Commission:** The national body with responsibility for organizing elections in Viet Nam.

**Election Council:** The bodies at the provincial, district and commune levels with responsibility for organizing elections in Viet Nam.

**EOWP:** Empowerment of Women in the Public Sector in the Context of International Economic Integration - Project of the Viet Nam Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme.

**FF:** Viet Nam Fatherland Front

**GDP:** Gross Domestic Product

**Gender:** The socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women.

**Gender Equality:** Refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women's issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centered development (Source: UN Women).

**MDG:** In 2000, 189 nations made a promise to free people from extreme poverty and multiple deprivations. This pledge became the eight Millennium Development Goals to be achieved by 2015. In September 2010, the world recommitted itself to accelerate progress towards these goals. The 3<sup>rd</sup> goal(MDG3) is to promote gender equality and empower women. (Source: UNDP)

**MOHA:** Viet Nam Ministry of Home Affairs

**MOLISA:** Viet Nam Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs

**MP:** Member of Parliament (National Assembly)

**NA:** National Assembly (Parliament)

**NCFAW:** National Committee for the Advancement of Women

**NGO:** Non Governmental Organization (social organizations)

**Nominee/ Nomination Candidate:** An individual who has been proposed to become an electoral candidate but is not yet at the stage that their name is on the ballot.

**People's Committees:** The local government body at the provincial, district or commune level.



**People's Council:** The representative institution (legislature) at the provincial, district or commune level.

**Proxy Voting:** Voters who fulfill certain legislative qualifications may be able to appoint a proxy voter to vote for them. A proxy vote may be given where a voter is unable to attend a voting station through infirmity, employment requirements, or being absent from the area on voting day-- often similar qualifications to those for voting by mail. (Source: ACE Network)

**SCNA:** Standing Committee of the National Assembly

**Self-nominated candidates:** Candidates who are not proposed by the central level nor by an organization, but who, on their own initiative, decide to stand for election.

**Structure (co cau):** The set of criteria that is negotiated at the central level regarding organizations and social groups that should be represented among candidates for the National Assembly.

**VWU:** Viet Nam Women's Union

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