

Country Briefing Paper

WOMEN IN VIET NAM

**Regional and Sustainable Development Department
and Mekong Department
Asian Development Bank
Manila, Philippines
2002**

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Published November 2002

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ISBN 971-561-461-2

Publication Stock No. 070202

Published by the Asian Development Bank
P.O. Box 789, 0980, Manila, Philippines

This report is one of a series on the status and role of women in developing member countries of the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The primary purpose of the series is to provide information on conditions facing women in these countries in order to assist ADB staff in formulating country strategies and programs, and in project design and implementation.

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The report updates the information contained in an earlier publication, *Women in Development: Viet Nam*, published by ADB in 1995.

It is hoped that the series will also be useful to government and nongovernment organizations and individuals working in the field of gender and development.

ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	-	Asian Development Bank
CEDAW	-	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CFAW	-	Committee for the Advancement of Women
CIDA	-	Canadian International Development Agency
FAO	-	Food and Agriculture Organization
GAD	-	gender and development
GDP	-	gross domestic product
GCOP	-	Government Committee on Organization and Personnel
GSO	-	General Statistics Office
MARD	-	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
MOLISA	-	Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs
NCFAW	-	National Committee for the Advancement of Women
NGO	-	nongovernment organization
POA1	-	National Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women 2005
POA2	-	National Gender Strategy and Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women 2001–2005
RNE	-	Royal Netherlands Embassy
SIDA	-	Swedish International Development Agency
TWG	-	technical working group (MARD)
UNDP	-	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	-	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
VBARD	-	Viet Nam Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development
VCP	-	Vietnamese Communist Party
VTE	-	Vocational and Technical Education
VLSS93	-	Viet Nam Living Standards Survey, 1992/93
VLSS98	-	Viet Nam Living Standards Survey, 1997/98
VWU	-	Viet Nam Women’s Union
WB	-	World Bank
WID	-	women in development

NOTE

In this report, “\$” refers to US dollars.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Viet Nam has made good progress in improving the well-being of women and reducing gender disparities. The Government has made impressive advances in narrowing the gender gaps in terms of improved income and access to productive resources, education, and health care. However, gender gaps continue to exist. Overall, health and education indicators for women are worse than for men, wage differentials persist, and women are underrepresented in the formal labor market. Differences are also apparent in state employment, access to credit and land, time worked, political representation, and decision making.

Pockets of gender disparity are apparent, particularly within poorer communities where competition over scarce resources exposes and reinforces gender inequalities. Gender disparity also appears in national-level statistics within particular areas and these disparities are magnified within poor households. For example, inequity exists for girls in general in upper secondary, vocational and technical, and university education. Disparity also exists in hours worked (including in the home) and income received. The most disadvantaged women are those in poor rural areas, remote and mountainous areas, and members of ethnic minority communities.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL STATUS OF WOMEN

At present, 90% of adult males and 79% of adult females are literate. Of children aged more than 5 years old, 12% of girls and 7.5% of boys have never attended school, and these proportions have remained remarkably constant over the past 20 years. Gender gaps are prominent among the poor and ethnic minorities and in rural areas of the Northern Uplands, the Mekong Delta, the Central Coast and Central Highlands, due to school fees and the opportunity cost of child labor. While the gender gap is closing for higher education, it persists in vocational and technical education (VTE), and signs of sex segregation in upper secondary and university education are becoming more obvious, with females clustering in pedagogy, social sciences, and linguistics, while males dominate technical and scientific courses. This segregation potentially disadvantages women from fully participating in new industries, such as information technology, biotechnology, and application of new materials.

Great advances have been made in access to health facilities, which benefits women directly because they need health services more than do men. However, pockets of disadvantage exist in remote areas and for the poor who cannot afford the fees introduced during economic reform (*doi moi*). Women's greater demand for health services because of their reproductive role and their susceptibility to reproductive tract infections means that the lack of health care services has a greater impact on women. Fee for service, ineffective implementation of the fee exemption program, and inequitable budget allocation mechanisms have resulted in unequal access to quality health care. The fees and charges for these services are often out of the reach of the poorest families; they may forego accessing services and self-treat themselves and their children.

Common health problems for ethnic minority women and their families include malaria, malnutrition,¹ and respiratory and gynecological infections. These result in high levels of maternal mortality, obstetric complications, and maternal and child malnutrition. In resource-constrained households, women's share of food is lower than that of men. Although more than

50% of families now use modern contraception methods, one of the major health risks to women is the dominance of intrusive forms of contraception (intra-uterine devices) and family planning (abortion). It is estimated that 40% of pregnancies are terminated,² the highest rate in the world (2.5 per woman).³

New issues for women's health are emerging with increasing awareness of promiscuity and domestic violence. In an environment where the use of condoms is not common and intravenous drug use is a significant problem, the risks of contracting HIV/AIDS have also grown. The fight against HIV/AIDS is intrinsically linked with women's empowerment. In 2000, 14% of HIV cases in the country were women, and the prevalence of HIV in female sex workers was 4%.⁴ Domestic violence is clearly a health issue for women. In recent years, official reports of domestic violence have increased and are more likely to be heard in court.

There is no formal barrier to women's participation in the electoral process. Although representation of women elected to positions at the local level has increased, it is still low relative to their presence in the National Assembly. Women are poorly represented in strategic decision-making bodies such as party committees. There are no women in the Politburo and the proportion of women in the Central Committee has declined. Overall, the political decision-making role of women has deteriorated.

PARTICIPATION IN THE ECONOMY AND LEGAL RIGHTS

Women's labor force participation rates have been high since the war. However, since *doi moi* and improved economic conditions, their participation in the formal economy has declined. Economically active women are concentrated in agriculture where they contribute more hours of labor than do men to cultivation, livestock breeding, agriculture processing, and marketing of agriculture produce. Yet, they have only limited access to extension services. Since 1993, male farm employment has declined and the number of female farmers has increased.⁵ It is clear that as nonfarm enterprises are becoming more economically attractive, women are being left behind in the less dynamic agriculture sector.

Wage employment opportunities in rural areas are limited for women. Women are also less successful in establishing small and medium enterprises in the formal sector because of lack of resources including labor time, management skills, knowledge of the market, access to credit, and land. Less than one tenth of economically active women are now employed by the State. During the initial years of *doi moi*, it is estimated that female labor accounted for 70% of the loss from the state sector, and by 1999 only 42% of state employees were women. Women work about the same time in income-earning activities but earn 14% less than men per month.⁶ These differentials decreased during the 1990s, although differences persist in the latter years of the working life cycle.

According to the 1996 Constitution and relevant laws, women and men are granted equal rights with respect to economic opportunities, marriage and family matters, political participation, public administration, and ownership of property including land. The 2000 Law on Marriage and Family stipulates that land-use certificates for household common land must list the names of both spouses, indicating shared possession. However, the 1993 Land Law, which predates it, does not mention co-ownership, and in 80% of cases, land-use certificates in rural areas are registered

in the name of the male household head. This can make it more difficult for women to access credit and pursue business opportunities. Although women have equal property rights, they are often disadvantaged due to social factors, which cut across and often contradict the legislation, whose enforcement is often left to the discretion of local officials.

GOVERNMENT POLICY AND PROGRAM ON WOMEN

The Government has adopted a Gender Strategy and National Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women 2001–2005 (POA2), which is the most important gender-specific planning document. The Plan outlines 6 objectives and activities in the areas of employment and economic status for women, education and training, health, leadership and decision making, women's rights, and strengthening the national machinery. Each ministry has a Committee for the Advancement of Women, responsible for drafting ministry-based gender strategies and action plans to promote and facilitate gender mainstreaming. The Viet Nam Women Union (VWU), a mass organization with more than 11 million members, operates at the commune, district, provincial, and national level. In addition to its mandate of raising awareness and advocacy at the grassroots level, the VWU has become more involved in implementing programs and projects.

ADB'S GENDER STRATEGY

The areas of more relevant gender gap in Viet Nam include (i) limited access to extension, credit, and land in the agriculture sector, where the female labor force is more prevalent, and difficulties in pursuing nonfarm employment prospects; (ii) lower enrollment in secondary and vocational/technical education, which in turn limits the potential for female employment and their voice in fertility choices; and (iii) creeping under-representation in state employment and in government decision-making positions. ADB's country strategy and program, which focuses on economic growth through rural and private sector development, equalization in human capital endowments through universal lower secondary education, and improved governance with special emphasis on public administration reform, is well suited to addressing these gaps by mainstreaming these concerns in ADB operations, as in the following recommendations:

- (i) In its operations in support of agriculture and rural development, ADB will strive to create a level playing field for men and women in the diversification of agriculture production and the development of rural enterprises, through a focus on equal access to agriculture inputs, extension services, skills training, and productive resources such as land and credit.
- (ii) In its operations in the social sector, ADB will ensure that gender equity and empowerment are promoted through equal access to secondary education and VTE. The choice of subjects will not be sex segregated. Achievement in secondary education is expected to lead to improved labor force participation, better control of contraception and fertility, and greater ability to overcome poverty. By promoting accessible health care and its equitable financing, ADB will also be benefiting women directly, given their greater dependence on health services during their reproductive years.
- (iii) In the area of governance, ADB will contribute to gender mainstreaming in all government policies and programs, through gender-capacity building support to relevant

government agencies and ensuring that all ADB assistance is gender inclusive. The focus will be on ensuring that civil service and public administration reform does not adversely affect women and that the reforms undertaken support the Government's gender mainstreaming goals.

IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY THROUGH ADB OPERATIONS

The three areas of focus above—agriculture and rural development, socially inclusive development, and governance—are targeted to create benefits for women, greater equity for women in access to resources and services, and the empowerment of women both within the public and private domain. The aims of the strategy can be achieved by incorporating gender concerns into ongoing and proposed projects, which lend themselves to these strategic priorities.

The proposed approach will be implemented mostly by mainstreaming gender considerations into ADB projects, with particular attention to those in agriculture and rural development, small and medium enterprises, secondary education, health services and financing, and public administration reform. The routine conduct of gender analysis will be actively promoted in the design stage to ensure that women's needs are met and more effectively integrated. Collection of sex-disaggregated data at the design and benefit monitoring and evaluation stages will be required. Special components will be designed and resources allocated, where women are identified as a clear target group.

Following are more specific recommendations.

Agriculture and Rural Development

Given women's significant role in the agriculture sector, ADB assistance will be designed to be responsive to women's roles, priorities and needs, and to ensure equal access to resources such as seeds, fertilizers, information, new technology, and extension services. Women's distinct role and responsibilities in the sustainable use of natural resources, as key resource users and managers, will be supported. For example, community awareness programs will be developed with women as a specific target group; women will be actively encouraged to participate in land-use planning, social forestry, and other income-earning opportunities; and provision will be made for women's access to and control over natural resources. Poverty reduction initiatives will include a focus on reducing female poverty. Possible approaches include development of strategies to increase and enhance women's employment prospects in the informal sector, promoting rural nonfarm employment and income-generating opportunities, and providing greater access to credit. Community-based livelihood projects to address food security, crop and livestock diversification, and microfinance will be developed with poor women as a target group.

Socially Inclusive Development

The focus will be on improving access to and retention rates in secondary schooling and VTE for girls, especially poor and ethnic minority girls and women. To achieve these aims, ADB projects will explore mechanisms such as fellowships, application of affirmative actions principles, stipends, and targets. Girls' entry into nontraditional fields such as science,

technology, and vocational and technical courses will be supported, through priority for female access to VTE and design of appropriate curricula to provide girls with realistic marketable skills.

Governance

Improvements in governance and participation in decision making to become gender inclusive will be supported. The POA2 goals of gender mainstreaming in sectoral ministries through the review of skills mix and requirements and policy and planning procedures will also be supported directly or indirectly.

The success in improving the well-being of women and reducing gender disparities in Viet Nam has been impressive.⁷ According to national indicators on life expectancy, maternal mortality, basic education, and primary health care, the position of women compares favorably with that of neighboring countries and countries with a similar gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (Table 1.1). Viet Nam ranked 108 out of 174 according to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) gender-related development index, with a 5-point better ranking than for the Human Development Index.⁸ However, these national indicators say little about the pockets of gender inequality across the country—especially significant within poor households—and the challenges to female empowerment in the market economy and formal political system.

Table 1.1: Gender Statistics of Viet Nam and its Neighbors

Country	GDP/ Capita (\$)	Life Expectancy at Birth M–F ^a 1998	Maternal Mortality Rate per 100,000 Births 1990–1998	Female Adult Literacy (%)	Population Using Adequate Sanitation (%)	Population with Access to Essential Drugs (%)	Births Attended by Skilled Health Staff (%)
Cambodia	1,361	52–55			18	30	31
China, People's Republic of	3,617	68–72	85	75.5	38	85	
Hong Kong, China	22,090	76–82		89.7			225
India	2,248		410	44.5	31	35	
Indonesia	2,857	62–64	450	81.3	66	80	47
Lao PDR	1,471	52–55	650	31.7	46	66	
Malaysia	8,209	70–75	39	82.8	98	70	
Myanmar	1,027	58–62	230	80.1	46	60	
Nepal	1,237	58–58	540	22.8	27	20	32
Philippines		67–71	270	94.4	83	56	56
Singapore	20,767	75–79	6	88.0	100	100	100
Thailand	6,132	70–75	44	93.5	96	95	95
Viet Nam	1,860	66–71	160	91.0	73	85	77

^aM–F = male–female

Source: UNDP Human Development Report 2000.

The apparent lack of gender disparity at the national level compared to the profound gaps between rural and urban populations, rich and poor, and Kinh and ethnic minorities is often used as a justification for dismissing gender-and-development (GAD) issues in Viet Nam. However, such judgments should be made cautiously.⁹

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) 1995 country briefing paper on women in Viet Nam¹⁰ pointed to the erosion of women's status as the market economy evolves. More recent GAD literature in Viet Nam affirms that analysis and points to increasing differentials between

men's and women's participation at the national level in strategically important areas, such as access to upper secondary education, technical and vocational education, state employment, access to credit and land, time worked, political representation, agriculture production, and family planning.¹¹ Of growing concern in Viet Nam is the revelation of entrenched gender-based violence both within and outside the home, and health risks associated with excessively high rates of abortion. More importantly, the limited data available indicate that the gender gap is greatest and growing within poor and disadvantaged households.¹²

Much progress has been made through the policies of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) and the Government since the 1950s. Gender equality was institutionalized in the 1946 Constitution and has been enhanced in each constitutional reform and through legislation and regulations. Challenging the legacies of Confucian and French rule, Viet Nam reduced gender disparities in education, health, rights to property, access to income and resources, and participation in formal decision-making bodies. Under the VCP, women became major contributors to economic growth through high levels of participation in agriculture, handicraft production, trading, and labor force participation, supported by a degree of socialized childcare and household responsibilities.

Economic transition, which began in the 1980s, brought the unraveling of the cooperative agriculture system, which had the positive results of increased productivity and lower levels of poverty, especially in rural areas. However, with *doi moi* (policy of economic renovation), came economic competition and the user-pays principle. As a consequence, women's equitable position has been challenged. Reproductive responsibilities, such as childcare and household duties, were no longer met by the community but by the household; consequently, the length of women's working day increased. Women in the state sector are required to retire 5 years earlier than men, which disadvantages them in achieving seniority. Women lost their jobs at a faster rate than men with rationalization of the state sector and they were not compensated by increased access to productive resources relative to that of men in the growing nonfarm and private sector. For example, as cooperative land was divided among the community, men were issued land-use certificates. Credit was more easily obtained by men and men's greater mobility allowed them to search for employment opportunities further from home.

The user-pays principle for such services as health and education also disadvantaged women because of their reproductive role, resulting in higher demand than men for health services; and because the opportunity costs for education of females are higher than for males. The gender gap appears when these costs increase at the upper secondary level. Furthermore, with greater decision-making power allocated to the political machinery (including the National Assembly and the provincial, district, and commune levels), women's representation began to decline.

Although national statistics indicate an improvement in general well-being of men and women, improvement for women has lagged behind that of men in certain areas and social groups. Pockets of gender disparity are apparent particularly within the poorer communities where there is competition for scarce resources.

Statistical indicators of gender disparity either at the national or household level say little about changes in gender beliefs and practices and empowerment of women. In fact, social

attitudes of inequality remain and are reflected both within the public space of the paid workforce and, especially, within the private space of the family. In the workforce, men expect to be senior to women. Similarly, wives and daughters must defer to senior men especially in public.

The gender impact of *doi moi* is indeed complex and the situation is still in a state of flux. Data from different sources including the 1989 and 1999 censuses, the Viet Nam Living Standards Survey in 1993 (VLSS93) and 1998 (VLSS98), other surveys, and case studies are often contradictory. Nevertheless, it is clear that economic reform will continue in Viet Nam and agriculture will become a less significant economic activity. Nonfarm employment within both rural and urban areas will provide new opportunities for both women and men. As the economic transition continues, it is critical that women and men have equal chances to participate and that short-term as well as the more persistent gender disparities are redressed. This will come through equal access to all forms of education, especially business skills and information technology, and equal access to productive resources, such as credit and political decision making.

The overall situation is changing rapidly and statistically significant data are limited. Therefore, not surprisingly, analysis is still controversial (Desai 2000). What is less controversial is the disadvantage suffered by the poor, many of whom are ethnic minorities. Women within these households are the most disadvantaged in Viet Nam. The situation for many poor ethnic minority women has changed little as a consequence of *doi moi* and their position relative to men has deteriorated.

Undeniably, Viet Nam is still the leader in the subregion with respect to institutionalizing gender equity. For Viet Nam to maintain this position, at least three challenges arise for the Government:

- (i) maintenance of gender equity priorities as the State progressively withdraws from intervention in the daily lives of people with the implementation of economic reforms (e.g., labor allocation and childcare)—policies on gender equity imposed from above may be difficult to sustain as a culture of patriarchy reemerges;
- (ii) transparency in monitoring gender gaps in access to services, especially in the flagship sectors of health and education of the previous command economy; and
- (iii) development of new and innovative policies and programs to deal with the problems outlined at the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women, including domestic violence, choice of contraception, and women trafficking—a daunting task for any government.

In summary, although national indicators present a positive picture, areas of gender disparity exist, most clearly within the ethnic poor but also at the national level in vocational and technical education (VTE), upper secondary education, university, senior positions in bureaucracy, political representation, income levels, and hours worked. The sole focus on disparity and levels of participation of women—the methodology characteristic of the traditional women-in-development (WID) approach—reveals little about the effectiveness of women's participation and empowerment either in the public or private domain. It is argued here that more can be achieved in Viet Nam with respect to the effectiveness of women's participation and empowerment.

DEMOGRAPHY

In 1999, it was estimated that Viet Nam had a population of 76.3 million.¹³ This represents a modest annual population growth rate of 1.54%, reflecting the relative success of Viet Nam's family planning policy. Women comprise 50.8% of the population and are markedly overrepresented in the age cohorts higher than 50 years due to the dramatic loss of life, particularly of men, during the Viet Nam War. This overrepresentation contributes to a high number of female-headed households (45% of those with heads more than 50 years old). Viet Nam also has a young population, with about 44% of the population aged less than 20 years (Table 2.1). The youthfulness of the population creates excessive demand for job creation but also propels the rapid pace of economic, social, and cultural change that is evident today.

The sex ratio indicates a male bias among those aged less than 15 years (Table 2.1), which suggests male preference in children. Typically, if a couple produces two daughters, they will try for a son. If they have two sons, they are less inclined to try for a daughter. Female infanticide may also occur in some areas where ancestor worship and the need for a male heir are strong.

National demographic statistics have improved for women and children during the last decade but the improvement has been geographically uneven. The under-5 mortality rate fell from 55 to 48 per 1,000 live births from 1989 to 1999, the infant mortality rate declined to 37 per 1,000 live births by 1999¹⁴ and life expectancy is 11 years higher than that of other countries of similar GDP per capita. During 1989–1999, delivery complications fell by 52%, maternal mortality halved from 2 to 1 per 1,000 births and the fertility rate declined from 3.8 in 1989 to 2.3.¹⁵

Table 2.1: Population Structure by Sex and Age, 1999

Age Group	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)	Sex Ratio
0–4	10.09	8.98	9.52	108.6
5–9	12.65	11.38	12.00	107.4
10–14	12.59	11.36	11.96	107.2
15–19	10.99	10.55	10.77	100.7
20–24	8.75	8.97	8.86	94.3
25–29	8.60	8.37	8.48	99.3
30–34	7.96	7.77	7.86	99.0
35–39	7.20	7.35	7.27	94.7
40–44	5.72	6.09	5.91	90.7
45–49	3.91	4.22	4.07	89.7
50–54	2.57	3.02	2.80	82.4
55–59	2.12	2.60	2.36	78.5
60–64	2.07	2.55	2.31	78.3
65+	4.80	6.79	5.81	68.3
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	96.7

Source: Population and Housing Census Sample (GSO 2000).

The crude birth rate fell from 30.1 per 1,000 women in 1989 to 19.9 in 1999. It was kept low among the Kinh through vigorous family planning campaigns and the two-child policy, which has been rescinded only recently. The family planning policy made exceptions for ethnic minorities, who were allowed to have more than two children, particularly the smaller population groups. However, these statistics vary markedly by ethnic group, economic quintile, and region. Major gaps are evident between rural and urban communities. For example, in 1999 the infant mortality rate was 41.0 in the rural areas compared to only 18.3 in the urban areas, the crude birth

rate was 21.2 compared to 15.9, and the total fertility rate was 2.6 compared to 1.7. Regional differences also exist, especially between the Southeast (Ho Chi Minh City) and Red River Delta (Hanoi) with the best records, and the poorer Central Highlands and Northern Uplands with the worst.¹⁶

According to the 1999 Population and Housing Census Sample results, female-headed households comprised 21.6% of households and the proportion of female-headed households was higher (more than 30%) in both the poorest areas (northern mountains, the midlands, and the Central Highlands) and the most prosperous areas (Southeast).¹⁷ These differences were because of the higher loss of life in the mountainous areas than elsewhere during the war, which gave rise to a higher proportion of widowed female-headed households; and migration by men from both the poor and prosperous areas to take advantage of nonfarm opportunities offering higher income.

The population of Viet Nam is surprisingly mobile for an agriculturally based economy. About one third of the population aged more than 10 years has moved at least once and this increases to more than 50% in the Southeast. The Southeast and the Central Highlands are net receivers of migrants. People move for economic reasons, government resettlement, to join other family members, in response to disasters such as floods and fire, and in the past because of war. Although 1999 census data on migration are not yet disaggregated by sex, case study research indicates that not only young men but also young single women are leaving the countryside to secure urban employment.¹⁸ In the longer term this will create pressure on urban resources.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

The extended family is the main social and economic unit within Viet Nam. Although 71% of families reside as nuclear families, these families often live adjacent to their parents and households of siblings, and still function as an extended family.

The expectation is that all people marry. In 1999, only 3.3% of those aged more than 50 years claimed never to have married.¹⁹ The mean age for first marriage is higher in urban than in rural areas but is rising slightly for both men and women in general: for men, 25.5 years in 1999 compared to 24.5 in 1989; and for women, 24 years compared to 23.2, respectively. After a temporary rush toward early marriages in the early 1990s when housing land within the commune was being distributed to households, the age of rural marriage is also rising, with the exception of some ethnic minority groups in which underage marriage is still common.²⁰ The divorce rate is still low in Viet Nam, although it is increasing, especially in urban areas. According to the 1999 census, 13% of women aged over 15 years are widowed, separated, or divorced. However, this is probably under-enumerated due to the social stigma.

Most Kinh communities are patrilocal, which means that after marriage the couple live in the husband's village and often with his family if he is the first son. Both sons and daughters may inherit land. However, if a woman marries into another village, it may be difficult for her to take up her land rights. In the case of divorce, the wife has rights over any land that she has brought to the marriage and theoretically over a proportion of land used by the couple.

Patriarchy underpins the functioning of the family. Throughout their lives, Vietnamese women must defer firstly to their fathers, then their husbands, and finally their eldest son. Wives

should be compliant; they should not be seen to be the major decision maker or income earner; they should be sexually available to their husbands and take responsibility for contraception. Husbands are responsible for the behavior of their wives and have the right to discipline them where necessary.

Because the role of wife is that of a peacemaker, acts of domestic violence perpetrated by men rarely attract community criticism and are instead interpreted as the failure of the wife. Reconciliation is the preferred outcome of any domestic dispute. Consequently, separated and divorced women often carry blame within the community. Unmarried women should be chaste. Evidence to the contrary brings shame even in cases of sexual harassment, rape, incest, and forced prostitution. These social attitudes that diminish the standing of women in the community have indirectly sanctioned domestic violence, lack of choice of contraception, male irresponsibility with respect to the transmission of sexual transmitted diseases (e.g., HIV/AIDS), trafficking of women, and female infanticide. Although reliable comparative data are not available, there is no evidence to suggest that Viet Nam is more advanced than its neighbors in the area of gender-based violence.

Although patriarchy is strong, women have substantial decision-making power within the family and it is perceived that this power has increased. However, some areas of decision making appear to remain in the province of men. Women complain that they have little control over male expenditure on alcohol, tobacco, and gambling. They also note their lack of input into reproductive decisions; pressure exists for women to produce male progeny and the husband often insists on more children until a son is born, even though high birth rates have detrimental effects on women's health.²¹

HEALTH AND NUTRITION

Since the implementation of *doi moi*, Viet Nam has achieved great advances in health care. Many facilities have been upgraded and access to community health care has improved. Almost all communes have a health center, and of these 30% have a doctor and 82% have a midwife or obstetrics-pediatric assistant. Although access has improved nationally, some communities, mainly in poor and remote areas, are underserved.

Women have a greater demand for health services than men because of their reproductive roles and women's susceptibility to reproductive tract infections. Therefore, the lack of access to health care services has a greater impact on women. Fee for service, ineffective implementation of the fee exemption program, and inequitable budget allocation mechanisms have resulted in unequal access to quality health care. The fees and charges for these services are often out of the reach of the poorest households. The burden of taking care of sick children and the elderly is passed on to women in the family.

Poor health among ethnic minority households is due to isolation, lack of clean water, lack of infrastructure and equipment, high fertility rates, poor quality soil, shortage of food supply, and limited access to community health stations. Common health problems for ethnic minority women and their families include malaria, malnutrition, and respiratory and gynecological infections. These result in high levels of maternal mortality, obstetric complications, and maternal and child malnutrition.²² The gender gap in adult nutritional status is

greater in rural areas, in poorer households, and among ethnic minorities; in resource-constrained households, women's share of food is lower than that of men.²³

New issues for women's health are becoming evident with improved awareness of the impact on women's health of male promiscuity and domestic violence. Although awareness of male promiscuity and female prostitution is increasing it is not clear whether the incidence itself is also increasing. In an environment where the use of condoms is not common and intravenous drug use is a significant problem, the risks of HIV/AIDS have grown. Although the number of reported cases of HIV/AIDS in Viet Nam is still low compared to that in Thailand, it is increasing. By December 2000, the number of reported HIV infections reached 32,000. However, it is estimated that 107,000 people are living with HIV/AIDS (0.2% of the adult population), of which 65% of cases are related to intravenous drug use. The prevalence of HIV in female sex workers in 2000 was 4.3%²⁴ and 14% of all HIV cases in the country were women. Without improvement in the status of women both economically and socially, the fight against HIV/AIDS is a lost cause. Women's empowerment and the decrease in the spread of HIV/AIDS are intrinsically linked.

Social attitudes restrict sexual empowerment for women. Women are responsible for contraception and the use of condoms is low. Although more than 50% of families now use modern contraception methods, the choice of contraception in isolated areas is limited to intra-uterine devices (38.5%). The use of oral contraceptives is increasing but the present rate is only 4–6% of couples. Oral contraceptives are expensive because they are imported. Supply is unreliable in remote areas and rural lifestyles are not conducive to the rigor of the daily regime. Abortion is still the most common form of family planning in Viet Nam. It is estimated that 40% of pregnancies are terminated,²⁵ the highest rate in the world (2.5 per woman)²⁶. Such high incidence of intrusive procedures has negative implications for women's health.

Domestic violence is clearly a health issue for women. In the past, domestic violence often went unreported and was dealt with by the family or sometimes the Viet Nam Women's Union (VWU, described in Chapter IV) and neighbors rather than the law. Social attitudes, which sanction a husband's right to discipline his wife, meant that domestic violence was not seen as problematic. Rather than address either the causes or consequences of domestic violence, the Vietnamese family's response was to preserve the marriage. In recent years, official reports of domestic violence have increased and a greater number of cases are being heard in court. This reflects a cultural shift with respect to the rights of women encouraged by international pressure for the Government to recognize such violence as a problem.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Progress in male and female education has been impressive in Viet Nam and the official rate of female literacy is high compared to that in neighboring countries (Table 1.1). The policy of the VCP since the 1946 Constitution has been to provide equal access to education for boys and girls to enable them to participate fully in achieving national goals. The correlation between education for women and reduced birth rates, improved nutrition, and health is now well known and Viet Nam's success in these areas is in part due to the focus on education for girls. Fertility rates are 53% lower and child mortality is 75% less for girls who have attended at least lower secondary education than for girls without schooling.²⁷

Enrollment and attainment rates in primary school have increased across the country and enrollment is nearly universal at the primary level (Table 2.2). However, these national statistics mask the disadvantage experienced by people in remote areas, especially ethnic minorities and the poor (Tables 2.3 and 2.4). Disadvantage includes not only lack of access to education but also the poor quality of education and low levels of attainment in many rural areas (Table 2.5).

Table 2.2: Rate of School Enrollment by Sex, 1993–1998 (%)

Level	1993		1998	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Primary	87.1	86.3	90.7	92.1
Lower Secondary	29.0	31.2	62.1	61.3
Higher Secondary	6.1	8.4	27.4	30.0

Source: VLSS93 and VLSS98 quoted in State Planning Committee – GSO 1994; Desai 2000.

At the national level, no difference is reported between boys and girls in enrollment rate in primary school. However, gender gaps appear in the poorest households, in the Central Highlands, and among the Chinese and the ethnic minorities (Table 2.3). Nationally, the gender gap appears in secondary schooling, at 6% in lower secondary (Table 2.4) and 11% in upper secondary. However, these gaps are narrow, especially in comparison to the initial high drop-out rate of girls following *doi moi* from 1990/91 to 1993/94. The gap is most pronounced within the poorest households, the rural areas, the Northern Uplands, the Mekong Delta, the Central Coast, and among ethnic minorities. Of those aged more than five-years old, 12% of girls and 7.5% of boys have never attended school, and these proportions have remained remarkably constant over the past 20 years. Of those aged between 6-14 years who have never attended school, 50% are from ethnic minority groups.²⁸ The gap is closing for higher education but not for vocational and technical education. Of some concern is the appearance of a gender gap in the levels of schooling completed by men and women in the age cohorts below 22 years.²⁹ In the adult population, although the national level of literacy is high, two out of every three illiterate people are women. At present, 90% of adult males and 79% of adult females are literate according to the conventional definitions of literacy.³⁰

Mean years of schooling are a better measure of education than enrollments, which do not reflect completion. On average, females have only 5.6 years of schooling compared to 6.8 for males but the largest gender gap occurs between Kinh and ethnic minorities (Table 2.5).

The real disparities in education are not around the issues of gender but in the different levels of achievement and performance of students in rural and urban areas, ethnic minorities and Kinh groups, and the rich and the poor. Within the rural poor and ethnic minority students, gender disparity is exacerbated, making women in this group doubly disadvantaged. The gap between girls and boys for the lowest income quintile is larger than for the top quintile.³¹ In the poorest quintile, the gap between girls and boys in primary school enrollments is pronounced at 5%, and reaches 12% in lower secondary (Tables 2.3 and 2.4).

Table 2.3: Age-specific Enrollment (% in school) Among Children 6–10 Years Old

	Girls (%)	No.	Boys (%)	No.	Overall (%)	No.	Gender Gap (%)
Per Capita Expenditure Quintiles							
Poorest 20%	83.8	410	89.1	418	86.4	828	5.3
II	94.5	360	95.1	378	94.8	738	0.6
III	96.7	323	97.7	338	97.2	661	0.9
IV	97.7	260	98.7	277	98.2	537	1.0
Richest 20%	98.5	262	96.9	296	97.6	558	1.7
Region							
Northern Uplands	96.2	286	96.6	282	96.4	568	0.4
Red River Delta	97.6	239	100.0	264	98.9	503	2.4
North Central	98.2	218	99.0	213	99.6	431	0.8
Central Coast	90.8	205	91.4	222	91.1	427	0.6
Central Highlands	75.7	149	85.6	164	80.9	313	9.8
Southeast	93.9	219	93.2	267	93.5	486	-0.7
Mekong Delta	85.8	299	90.0	295	87.9	594	4.2
Rural	92.2	1,309	94.8	1,361	93.5	2,670	2.7
Urban	97.5	306	95.0	346	96.2	652	-2.5
Ethnic Group							
Kinh	95.5	1,315	96.9	1,406	96.2	2,721	1.4
Chinese	96.8	31	90.4	25	93.9	56	6.4
Minority	81.1	270	85.7	276	83.4	546	4.6
Overall	93.0	1,616	94.8	1,707	93.9	3,323	1.9

Source: Desai 2000, Table 5.2.

Lower enrollment rates in poorer areas and among the ethnic minorities are attributed to higher monetary and opportunity costs and the perceived lack of relevance of education. Since *doi moi* and the implementation of the user-pays principle for services, the monetary costs of education have extended beyond the capacity of some poor households to pay—at least for all their children. Decisions about whom to educate are based on anticipated returns to the household. Principles of patriarchy favor the son. Although tuition is free at primary level, the families have to pay for books, uniform, the fee for extra lectures, the “voluntary” contribution, transportation, and lunch, which make up a substantial proportion of the total cost of a child’s attendance at primary school. The implementation of fee exemption for the poorest families is inefficient. The opportunity costs of the loss of child labor from household production also discourage poor households from investing in education, especially of daughters for whom the opportunity costs are greater.

Table 2.4: Age-specific Enrollment (% in school) Among Children 11–14 Years Old

	Girls (%)	No.	Boys (%)	No.	Overall (%)	No.	Gender Gap (%)
Per Capita Expenditure Quintiles							
Poorest 20%	68.2	291	80.5	282	74.2	573	12.4
II	83.2	292	84.5	310	83.9	602	1.2
III	87.2	274	93.7	329	90.7	603	6.6
IV	87.1	315	93.0	329	90.1	644	5.9
Richest 20%	96.8	267	98.8	291	97.9	558	2.0
Region							
Northern Uplands	82.6	224	91.6	253	87.4	477	9.0
Red River Delta	93.0	229	95.3	256	94.2	485	2.3
North Central	88.4	171	94.8	193	91.8	364	6.3
Central Coast	80.8	162	88.6	184	85.0	346	7.8
Central Highlands	80.3	117	86.6	111	83.3	228	6.4
Southeast	89.0	244	91.6	243	90.2	487	2.6
Mekong Delta	71.8	292	79.7	301	75.9	593	7.9
Rural	81.3	1,105	89.2	1,237	85.5	2,342	7.9
Urban	92.7	334	92.8	304	92.7	638	0.1
Ethnic group							
Kinh	84.6	1,213	89.6	1,283	87.2	2,496	5.1
Chinese	88.7	22	90.6	32	89.8	54	1.9
Minority	76.8	205	90.2	226	84.1	431	13.4
Overall	83.5	1,440	89.8	1,541	86.8	2,981	6.3

Source: Desai 2000, Table 5.3.

The working hours of primary pupils from the poorest quintile are double those of pupils from the richest one. The working hours of female pupils are 20–50% longer than those of males from all quintiles⁵² and this rate is 100% more for female Hmong children. For ethnic minorities, other obstacles to education are limited access to neighborhood schools, poor quality teachers, and the perceived irrelevance of the Kinh curriculum taught in Vietnamese language. Attendance at high schools for ethnic minority pupils usually involves boarding school, which is considered more dangerous for girls.

Table 2.5: Mean Years of Education by Social Group, 1998

Social Group	Female	Male
Total	5.6	6.8
Poor	5.0	6.0
Rich	9.0	10.4
Ethnic Minority	4.5	6.0
Kinh	7.2	8.5
Rural	5.1	6.2
Urban	7.4	8.5

Source: Bales 2000, 70.

Attendance at high schools for ethnic minority pupils usually involves boarding school, which is considered more dangerous for girls.

Table 2.6: Gender Streaming in Higher Education: Fields of Study Selected by Men and Women (%)

	Age cohorts								
	<= 24 years			25–34 years			>34 years		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Mathematics and Physical Sciences	7.1	10.1	8.5	4.5	12.7	8.1	10.1	18.1	12.9
Social Sciences (Economics, Political Science, etc.)	36.5	38.7	37.6	37.5	27.4	33.1	36.7	26.3	33.1
Geology, Electronics, Mining Technology	19.9	6.0	13.2	13.7	2.1	8.6	10.4	3.6	8.1
Chemistry, Construction, Technology	13.8	4.8	9.5	10.5	7.1	9.0	5.7	4.5	5.3
Agriculture, Forestry, Livestock	1.4	1.2	1.3	3.7	1.2	2.6	8.1	4.7	6.9
Medicine and Pharmacy	3.6	3.3	3.5	5.1	8.5	6.06	6.7	12.4	8.7
Pedagogy and Sports Education	7.2	7.6	7.4	7.2	21.3	13.4	6.5	17.6	10.3
Culture, Fine Arts, Linguistics	6.4	25.5	15.6	12.3	16.0	13.9	8.5	11.2	9.4
Police and Military	2.2	0.0	1.2	5.6	0.0	3.1	5.5	0.0	3.6
Other	1.9	2.9	2.4	0.0	3.8	1.7	1.9	1.6	1.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
No. of individuals	167	159	326	66	49	115	249	139	388

Source: Desai 2001a, Table 5.13.

Although girls perform better in both Vietnamese language and mathematics in primary school,³³ social expectation supports sex segregation in high school and university courses. Sex segregation extends into employment and it appears that gender stereotyping is becoming more pronounced. Before *doi moi*, women as well as men were encouraged to engage in technical areas. It was expected that girls would do well in mathematics at school and later become engineers and doctors. Now, females tend to cluster in pedagogy, social sciences, and linguistics while males dominate technical and scientific courses (Table 2.6). Current sex segregation, especially in technology, potentially disadvantages women from fully participating in new industries fostered by the Government, such as information technology, biotechnology, and new materials.³⁴

LEGAL RIGHTS

The legal rights of women were first institutionalized in Viet Nam in the 1946 Constitution. Since then women's rights have been a central tenet of government policy and are reflected in Vietnamese legislation. Men and women have equal civil rights with respect to economic opportunities, person and property, marriage and family matters, political participation, and public administration. The courts and institutions protect these rights. The penal code and the penal proceedings code also protect women against violence. Viet Nam's participation in the World Conferences on Women and signing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) have exposed the Government to international expectations on women's rights.

Tension exists between the law and international conventions. A criticism sometimes made on women's rights legislation in Viet Nam is the tendency for it to be protective rather than equalizing opportunities and burdens. For example, the Labor Code promulgated in 1995 is generous but effectively restricts the choices of women workers and encourages the employment of men over women.³⁵ It is stated in the code that women workers can take a day off per month during menstruation. The labor code reinforces gender stereotypes with its requirement for a compulsory crèche only when women are employed rather than for all parent workers, maternity leave rather than parental leave, and compulsory early retirement for women.

Tensions also exist between the State and tradition on gender equity, and as the role of the State diminishes, gender gains are more easily eroded. Since 1946, gender equity initiatives in legislation and the associated social support were imposed from the top. The VCP adopted strong gender equity measures, which were implemented through its central planning function. However, with the progressive implementation of *doi moi*, state support for gender initiatives is diminishing. Reproductive functions, such as childcare and household work, have been withdrawn. Clear articulation of gender concerns in such documents as the socioeconomic plan for the next 10 years has also diminished. As the State withdraws from gender concerns, the lack of synergy with culture gives rise to a lack of compliance with these laws at the local level. Even now, the implementation of existing legislation seems to vary according to personal commitment within local institutions.³⁶

According to the 1996 Constitution, women and men are granted equal rights regarding property. Relevant laws, such as the Civil Code (1995), the Law on Marriage and Family (1986,

2000), and the Land Law (1993), govern the ownership of property and the regulations regarding land. According to law, family members must be consulted before the household head can make decisions about the transfer, sale, rent, inheritance, mortgage, and contribution of land as equity for a business. Land-use certificates in rural areas are registered in the name of the male household head in 80% of cases. In urban areas, the tendency has been to register the names of husband and wife and usually the family members as well. Registration of land title is very complicated because land is the most valuable asset and in some circumstances may be registered in the name of a friend in order to disguise assets from the State.

The 2000 Law on Marriage and Family stipulates that land-use certificates for household common land must list the names of both spouses indicating shared possession. However, in the earlier Land Law, there is no mention of co-ownership. Questions now arise as to whether the certificates will be reissued under joint names. There is little ground swell to force these changes and staff of the General Department of Land Administration have little training in gender issues; most discussion of land at the commune level still excludes women.

Traditions of patriarchy challenge gender equity legislation and militate against compliance. International pressure groups argue that legislated equal rights to land are pivotal in the empowerment of women. Some international lobby groups argue that traditional values concerning the rights and roles of women have prevented women from enjoying equal access to land use.

In practice, when women divorce, it is possible that they lose access to land, because the disposal of land is an extended family matter rather than a matter for the individual. When two people from the same village marry, they acquire land from both sides of the family. Upon divorce, the woman retains rights to her portion. Because Viet Nam is largely patrilocal and women move to the village of the husband, women's access to land after divorce is unpredictable. Distance from her birth village to the couple's land and uncomfortable proximity to in-laws militates against maintaining use rights to the land. Under these circumstances, women may receive compensation in rice and livestock, but success often depends on personal connection. Widowed women do not necessarily take over the land-use certificate which may remain in the name of the deceased husband, be transferred to the eldest son, or revert back to the husband's family, but they are less disadvantaged than divorced/separated women.

OTHER ISSUES

Gender-based violence is not a Vietnamese problem but a global problem. It takes the form of trafficking of women, exploitation of women as sex workers, rape, and domestic violence. Data on gender-based violence in Viet Nam are scant and anecdotal and the problem has only recently received public attention. Available data suggest that since 1990, about 10,000 women and children have been sold, mainly as sex workers.³⁷ According to MOLISA and UNICEF, there are currently 200,000 women involved in the sex industry of whom 10% are children³⁸ and the number of domestic violence cases that have reached the courts has increased.

Although the legal framework to punish domestic violence is enshrined in the Constitution, the Law on Marriage and Family, and the criminal code, the incidence is

widespread. The Lao Cai Participatory Poverty Assessment³⁹ found that 40% of women in a lowland village and 70% in a highland village were regularly subjected to physical violence.

Social attitudes toward the appropriate role of women within the family mean that the victim is often blamed for gender-based violence, even for victims of rape, incest, entrapment, and domestic violence. Case studies suggest that domestic violence is usually linked to poverty, alcohol and/or gambling, jealousy, or mental illness. In the case study research, it was found that men often cite women “talking too much” as the main misdemeanor that prompts domestic violence.⁴⁰ In a society where the extended family is the dominant unit, it is not uncommon for other members of the husband’s family—both male and female—to engage in domestic violence against the wife. Victims experience a deep sense of shame and usually consider it a private matter although the demand for counseling centers, which focus on marriage and family issues, has reportedly increased.⁴¹ High-quality counseling and health services as well as a change in men’s attitude to women are required in order to improve women’s health and safety.

ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

The population of Viet Nam in 1999 was 76.4 million, of which more than 50% were in the labor force, most of which is engaged in agriculture and household production in rural areas. Wage workers made up only 39% of the labor force.⁴² Women's economic participation rate declined slightly from 52% to 49% from 1989 to 1999. The participation rate (proportion in the labor force of those aged 15–55 years) of women in 1999 was high at 67% but has also declined from 71% in 1989.

The reasons are complex and may include later entry into the labor force because more girls are students after the age of 15 years; earlier departure from the labor force because women retire earlier (retirement for female waged workers is compulsory at 55 years of age, 5 years earlier than for men); the impact of increased competition in the labor market; discrimination against women; increased well-being; and the social pressure for women to withdraw from the workforce and engage in domestic duties.⁴³ The return of women to domestic duties, and the “glass ceiling,” discriminates against women reaching leadership positions and earning high salaries.⁴⁴ In the past, the advantage of working until 60 years was insignificant because the salary for senior positions was little more than for a junior position. However, this has changed in recent years.⁴⁵

Women form a greater proportion of the labor force in rural areas (49%) than in urban areas (46%). Income-generating opportunities for women in rural areas are greater than in urban areas due to access to household agriculture production and activities associated with agriculture, such as small-scale food processing (e.g., production of noodles, drying fish), handicraft production, trading, and limited seasonal labor. The VLSS98 found that one quarter of urban women were not engaged in income-generating activities. Data from the VLSS93 and VLSS98 show that the proportion of women involved in domestic duties declined, but the censuses of 1989 and 1999 show the opposite. Urban household incomes are on average higher than rural household incomes, so the necessity for women to work may be perceived as less critical in urban areas. This is especially so in a changing social context in which patriarchal tendencies are reemerging and a male's status is elevated if he can support a nonworking wife.

The 1999 Population and Housing Census shows that 39% of the labor force are involved in wage labor and of these 42% are women. According to the VLSS98, which is a smaller sample, 38% of wage employees were women.⁴⁶ Furthermore, between 1993 and 1998, male wage employment in rural areas increased at a faster rate for men (9%) than for women (4%), indicating an increase in seasonal farm laboring. In urban areas, wage employment showed no increase for women during this period, but an increase of 5% for men.

In recent years, the State has become a less significant employer, especially for women. Only 7.3% of economically active women are employed by the State. Women lost jobs in the state sector faster than men and by 1999 only 42% of state employees were women. During the early period of *doi moi*, it is estimated that female labor accounted for about 70% of the loss from the state sector. However, with continued reform of the state sector, it is expected that labor redundancy will be a male problem because most of the remaining overstaffing is of males in

transportation and mining.⁴⁷ In 2000, the Government announced a decision to reduce the public service by 15%. If this decision is implemented, past experience shows that there may be a more detrimental impact on women than on men.

Women total about 51% of nonstate sector employment. However, the women who lost their jobs in the state sector are not the same as those who have joined the nonstate sector. Increased competition in the state sector meant that employees with low skill and low productivity, including many older women, were made redundant or given early retirement, whereas those engaged in the nonstate sector tend to be young and relatively more skilled.

Retrenchments from the state sector also resulted in the movement of women to household duties or self-employment in the informal sector. For some, the informal sector is preferred because the flexibility is more compatible with family responsibilities in spite of the disadvantage of increased insecurity⁴⁸ and fewer fringe benefits than in the state sector. But in the private sector income opportunities are greater with higher salaries and availability of overtime work, particularly in foreign-invested enterprises..

The nonstate sector includes private domestic enterprises, the collective sector, joint ventures, and 100% foreign-invested enterprises. Foreign and domestic capital has created employment opportunities for women both in administration and light manufacturing, such as in textiles, clothing and footwear, and food processing.⁴⁹ Women employees dominate in the foreign-investment sector (72%), the collective sector (54%), and joint ventures (52%).⁵⁰

Although gender divisions in wage labor exist, they are not as rigid as in many other countries. As a consequence, competition exists between male and female workers. The national pattern is that women are overrepresented in education, sales, food processing, accounting, and textile and garment manufacturing, and underrepresented in administration, management, services, skilled manual labor, and unskilled labor.⁵¹ Rural women waged workers concentrate in agriculture, skilled manual labor, unskilled labor, and as educational professionals. Women's labor in rural areas is also used as a tool to overcome hardship. Women are brought into a family through marriage to ease labor shortage. Young girls who leave the rural areas to seek employment in urban areas find unskilled jobs as street vendors, garbage collectors, maids, laborers and in cafes, restaurants, and beer stands. Women in Ho Chi Minh City have been sold to foreigners to ease poverty; children are adopted out for money.⁵² Economic participation does not guarantee empowerment.

In urban areas, both men and women are engaged in skilled manual work. Women are concentrated in occupations of skilled manual workers (e.g., textile and garment workers and construction), professionals in some fields including education, and unskilled workers. Urban men's occupations are more diverse, with a greater concentration of skilled workers in mining, metal works, woodworking, manufacturing, and handicrafts. Even in sectors dominated by women such as education, men hold most senior management positions. Although the seniority of women in both the public sector and state-owned enterprises was notable in 1989, women have become less prominent because of increased competition for senior positions.

Women work about the same number of hours in income-earning activities but earn 14% less than men.⁵³ Nevertheless, during the 1990s the wage gap between men and women

decreased—from 33% in 1993 to 22% in 1998.⁵⁴ The gap between fringe income of men and women also decreased in this period, from 85% to only 23%. However, the wage differential varies over the working life cycle. Wage incomes for female heads of household start to decline once they reach 50 years old, whereas for men it continues to increase during working life. Wage rates are about 31% higher for both women and men in urban than in rural areas, but the wage gap in both areas is remarkably similar.⁵⁵

It is clear that the gender disparity in income stems from levels of qualification (Table 3.1), ability to hold several positions simultaneously, and overtime. Employees may have a substantive position as well as a position in a special “project,” which also contributes income. It is easier for single childless women than for mothers to take advantage of such opportunities. Furthermore, wages in the foreign direct-investment sector tend to be higher than in the domestic sector. Women with children and/or who care for the aged, and older women with few skills or qualifications are the first to leave the wage labor force.

Table 3.1: Qualifications and Real Annual Wage Earnings (‘000 dong/hour) by Sex, 1998

Highest Level of Schooling Completed	Rural Areas		Urban Areas	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
No School	2,641	1,517	5,067	2,856
Less than Primary	2,399	1,775	4,991	3,582
Primary	2,623	2,070	5,495	4,754
Lower Secondary	2,787	2,209	6,434	5,204
Upper Secondary	3,583	3,471	7,887	6,506
Junior College/University	4,913	4,513	13,339	8,477

Source: Desai 2000, Table 4.30.

AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

According to the 1999 census, women comprise 54% of those engaged in agriculture compared to 60% in 1989. Of the female labor force, 68% (c.f., 58% of male labor) are engaged in the agriculture sector compared to 73% (c.f., 71% of male labor) in 1989.⁵⁶ At the same time returns to women are less than for men for the same work, indicating an increased subsidy to agriculture.

Economic transition has led to fundamental changes in the organization of agriculture production and gender relations within the agriculture community have also been affected. In a context of land shortage, one of the unintended outcomes of land reform has been the increasing fragmentation of household land, which interferes with efficient production. Between 1993 and 1998, the number of male farmers fell by 0.3% annually and the number of female farmers increased by 0.9% annually. During this period, 92% of all new entrants into the agriculture sector have been women, as men move to nonfarm employment.⁵⁷ These changes point to an increasing feminization of agriculture.

Although the declared agriculture incomes for farmers increased by 61% during the 1990s, agriculture income is declining relative to nonfarm income. This implies that women in

general are being left in the less dynamic sectors of the economy. However, they may not be worse off. In fact, female-headed households that receive remittances from absent husbands—although they have a heavier labor burden—are often better off financially than male-headed households that receive no remittances.⁵⁸

It is not clear whether the feminization of agriculture will continue at the current pace. The agriculture sector cannot continue to absorb the 1.2 to 1.4 million new entrants to the labor market each year. Both women and men will be forced to seek nonfarm employment. However, the social constraints on women's movement and their relative lack of vocational and technical skills will disadvantage women in this shift.

Although men and women work about the same number of hours in income-generating activities per year, women work twice as long as men in domestic duties, which means that they work up to 6–8 hours longer than men per day. Such a heavy work burden can affect women's health, especially during pregnancy, and also limits their participation in education, social activities, and community decision making. In many households, social goods and services such as refrigerators, microwave ovens, and washing machines have eased the intensity of women's labor, especially in urban areas. However, in poor rural households, their labor has become more intense, because it is substituted for communally-owned animal and mechanical power.

Decision making on the farm is largely the role of men, even in female-dominated areas such as irrigation.⁵⁹ An interesting finding of the VLSS98 was that in 27% of male headed households, women were found to be the decision makers.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, it is men who have access to land, credit, and technical training because they are considered the head of the household (and work shorter hours than women). The longer working hours of women leave them little time for agricultural extension and training courses. For example, even though women do as much of the work in cultivation (50.4% of total work) as men and more of the work in livestock maintenance (61.4% of total work), women comprise only 10% of participants in courses on cultivation and 25% in courses on animal husbandry. Very few agriculture extension officers are women.

The agriculture activities of ethnic minorities differ markedly from those of the Kinh. Many ethnic minority groups are engaged in shifting cultivation and some depend on hunting and gathering for their livelihood. Ethnic minorities are being pushed further into the fragile mountainous environments by the Kinh, who are moving into the uplands due to population pressure in the lowlands and government resettlement programs. Ethnic minority groups with limited access to the market economy resort to selling firewood and timber for building, which contributes to the environmental vulnerability caused by deforestation.⁶¹

SELF-EMPLOYMENT

Those who are economically active usually have more than one occupation and these occupations tend to straddle the state and nonstate sectors in order to optimize job security and income. More than 80% of those who work are self-employed in at least one of their occupations. The proportion is higher for women, with 89% of economically active women being self-employed and 23% wageworkers, which means that about 12% are engaged in both. Most women

are involved in small-scale agricultural production, but increasing numbers are engaged in nonfarm household production. Surprisingly, in urban areas where one would expect wage employment to dominate, three quarters of households derive some income from self-employment.⁶²

Segregation in self-employment exists but, as in other areas, it is not rigid. In nonfarm self-employment, women are more likely to be involved in trading in markets and stalls and on the street, while men are involved in production and services including transportation and construction. An exception to this generalization is that women are overrepresented in garment and textiles manufacture. Most self-employed men and women outside agriculture are involved in the informal sector, but more self-employed men than women are in the formal sector in registered businesses.

Most economically active women live in rural areas, and most self-employed women work in agriculture-related activities in the household. Of all women who worked during 1998, 78% (and 75% of men) were engaged in some form of agriculture-related production as shown in Table 3.2. In agriculture processing, women are involved in mulberry growing and sericulture, baking, and the production of dry rice noodles, dried fruits, herbal tea, sweets, and smoked meat. In manufacturing, they bind books, and produce medicinal vials, leather shoes, school bags, clothing, ceramics and porcelain, embroidery, and woven carpets. In tourism, they operate hotels and restaurants, and sell souvenirs. In the service sector, they are engaged in child and elderly care, home teaching, hairdressing, and as beauticians, tailors, caterers, and in laundries.

Table 3.2: Participation in Agriculture Self-employment Activities by Sex, 1998

Type of Work	Female (% of Total Females Who worked in Last Year)	Male (% of Total Males Who Worked in Last Year)
Cultivation	70.5	68.0
Livestock	61.8	43.7
Aquaculture, Fisheries	8.2	12.0
Forestry	3.9	5.6
Agriculture Processing	2.5	2.1
Agriculture Product Selling	6.9	2.1
Any Type of Agriculture Self-Employment	77.6	74.8

Source: Desai 2000, Table 4.15.

Of those who are self-employed and run businesses, men predominate. Where women employ others, they tend to employ fewer workers than men because women are mainly involved in small-scale trading. Even when operating outside trading, women still tend to employ fewer people than their male counterparts and run less profitable enterprises than men. Women's enterprises are undercapitalized due to lack of skill, time, resources, and credit.⁶³

One of the major changes to private enterprise in the past few years is the introduction of the enterprise law, which makes it easier to register a business. Almost 20,000 have been

registered in the past two years. The gender impact of the new enterprise law is difficult to ascertain because the data, which include costs and income of businesses, are confidential.

Women's ability to diversify into nonfarm activities has stronger and more consistent implications for the well-being of rural households. Households that are confined to farming and have diversified only into wage employment are systematically poorer than the rest. This finding suggests that a strategy to maximize opportunities for female nonfarm activities through access to credit, skill, and productive resources—especially for poor families—would contribute to greater well-being of these households.⁶⁴

ACCESS TO CREDIT

Viet Nam's economic transition to a market economy has created greater financing needs for both men and women. A number of lending channels exist in both the formal and informal sectors (Table 3.3). Formal institutions include the Viet Nam Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (VBARD), Viet Nam Bank for the Poor, People's Credit Fund, and informal funds of moneylenders, traders, and relatives (revolving credit funds). Women tend to borrow from informal sources where interest rates are higher and funds are limited, whereas men more commonly borrow from government banks (Table 3.3). The VLSS98 shows that women hold 41% of all loans but only 29% of loans from official sources.⁶⁵ Access to credit is particularly difficult for the poor and for poor women in particular. Analysis of why women tend to borrow from informal sources is not conclusive. However, it is related to the limitation of one loan per family from formal sources, generally in the name of a male; impediments in the application process; and women's lack of skill and confidence in larger-scale entrepreneurial activities.

Women's borrowing tends to be for small loans. The VWU manages a revolving credit scheme of dong (D) 4,000 billion and makes low-interest loans available to women. Women borrow small amounts to buy chickens, piglets, and rice seed (D300,000–800,000). Access to VWU funds is seen more as a charity than for enterprise development and the credit is often tied to acceptance of other programs managed by them such as contraception, enrollment in adult literacy programs, nutrition programs, information exchange, and agriculture extension.⁶⁶ Repayment occurs in more than 90% of cases, because the VWU has the capacity to apply social pressure through its regular meetings.

The VBARD is another source of formal credit for women. Of the 4 million farmers who borrow from this bank each year, only 10% are women. Collateral is not required for loans of less than D5 million, but in practice staff require a property list and collateral trust from the chairperson of the commune's people's committee. If the borrower defaults, funds are taken from the commune budget. Female heads of household may experience more difficulty securing a loan if they are not influential in the commune. Divorced and separated women may experience opposition due to the social stigma. The People's Credit Fund also offers loans without collateral, but the interest is higher and the term is shorter than for VBARD. The Viet Nam Bank for the Poor is operated through VBARD but does not target women.

Table 3.3: Source of Loans by Sex and Relationship of Borrower to Household Head (%)

	Private Money Lender	Relative	Other Individual	Bank for the Poor	Other Govt. Banks	Programs	Other Sources	Total	No. Loans	Percent of All Loans
Sex and Relationship to Household Head										
Male Head	8.6	22.2	16.4	7.9	33.9	5.8	5.1	100.0	2,636	59.3
Female Head	11.1	21.4	24.4	8.9	22.8	6.7	4.7	100.0	822	1,704.0
Male Spouse	4.8	25.1	26.6	9.5	23.0	0.0	11.1	100.0	97	2.1
Female Spouse	12.3	34.3	20.7	4.7	13.2	9.3	5.5	100.0	722	15.9
Other Male	6.9	33.9	19.6	4.4	28.3	2.7	4.2	100.0	147	3.2
Other Female	9.4	15.6	39.5	5.6	18.0	1.7	10.3	100.0	102	2.1
Sex of Household Head										
Male	9.2	25.0	17.5	7.2	29.4	6.4	5.3	100.0	347	77.7
Female with Spouse										
Female without Spouse	6.4	23.3	26.9	10.7	21.9	5.2	5.6	100.0	4	8.7
	13.3	20.5	24.9	6.7	23.4	5.8	5.5	100.0	6	13.7
Sex of Borrower										
Male	8.4	22.9	16.9	7.8	33.3	5.5	5.3	100.0	2,880	64.6
Female	11.6	26.8	23.7	6.8	18.2	7.6	5.4	100.0	1,646	35.4
Total	9.5	24.3	19.3	7.4	27.9	6.2	5.3	100.0	4,526	100.0

Source: Desai 2000

It is clear that women have less access to credit than men, but the impact on gender or household well-being is not clear.⁶⁷ Because most adults are part of male-headed households or have adult men within female-headed households, these households are probably not disadvantaged regarding access to credit. Income is usually shared within the household; thus, the gender impact of differential access to credit is minimized. Furthermore, a household can only have one loan at a time and each loan requires a second signature as legal inheritor, which is usually the wife; again, the impact on the household is minimized.

Problems arise where income is not pooled or there is no adult male to negotiate a loan. Income may not be pooled where the husband is a seasonal migrant, a gambler, an addict, or withholds money. A female who heads a household may not be able to secure a loan because of her gender. These examples underline the necessity for policies to formalize gender equity.

POVERTY AND GENDER

There is no doubt that poverty declined in Viet Nam during the 1990s. This is measured in terms of increasing expenditures per capita and improving social indicators and is also reflected in the perception of poor households that their well-being has improved. The depth of poverty across the country diminished during the 1990s, yet remains significant (Table 3.4). The proportion of households below the poverty line decreased from 58% in 1993 to 37% in 1998. However, these gains are fragile. Many individuals are clustered just above the poverty line and can slip back into poverty through personal tragedy, ill health, or natural disasters.⁶⁸

Poverty in its broad sense is not limited to low income and consumption but includes lack of access to services such as education and health care, and other nonmaterial dimensions such as insecurity, powerlessness, and social exclusion. In this sense, a large proportion of the poor in Viet Nam are women—health and education indicators for women are worse than for men, wage differentials exist, and women are underrepresented in the formal labor market. An additional dimension is that the gender gap appears to be more acute within poor households.

Although poverty has been reduced, inequity has increased slightly, as seen by the rise in the Gini coefficient from 0.33 in 1993 to 0.35 in 1998, which reflects the different pace of economic growth in rural and urban areas. Incomes in rural areas grew by 30% whereas urban incomes grew by 61% during this period. Most poverty occurs in rural areas (45% of the rural population and 90% of the poor) with much lower incidence in urban areas (10% of the urban population). The rural poor are at greater risk because they are more vulnerable to shocks caused by natural disasters and ill health. Most of them are in the agriculture sector. In 1998, 79% of the

Table 3.4: Depth of Poverty by Region, 1993 and 1998

Region	Poverty Gap Index*	
	1993	1998
Northern Uplands	26.8	16.8
Red River Delta	18.8	5.7
North Central	24.7	11.8
Central Coast	16.8	10.6
Central Highlands	26.3	19.1
Southeast	9.2	1.3
Mekong Delta	13.5	8.1
All Viet Nam	18.5	9.5

* The Poverty Gap Index measures the depth of poverty, i.e., how far households are below the poverty line compared to the nation as a whole.

Source: World Bank estimates based on VLSS93 and VLSS98 (in Government-Donor-NGO Poverty Working Group 1999, 16).

country's poor but only 61% of the population were employed in agriculture.⁶⁹ Poverty is associated with small farmers who engage in subsistence agriculture and nonfarm activities that have low productivity because these people lack skills, credit, and infrastructure services.

Poverty is unevenly spread across the country. Poor communities are generally located in rural areas and are concentrated in the remote and mountainous areas of the Central Highlands, Northern Uplands, and North Central regions (Table 3.5). The regions that contribute to the greatest number of poor are the Northern Uplands, the Mekong (Red River) Delta, and the Northern Central region. Poor areas usually coincide with a concentration of ethnic minorities.

Table 3.5: Regional Concentration of Poverty in Viet Nam, 1993 and 1998

Region	Contribution to Total Poverty		Share of Population (%) 1998	Population (million) 1998
	1993	1998		
Northern Uplands	21	28	18	13.5
Red River Delta	23	15	20	14.9
North Central	16	18	14	10.5
Central Coast	10	10	11	8.1
Central Highlands	4	5	4	2.8
Southeast	7	3	13	9.7
All Viet Nam	100	100	100	75.8

Source: World Bank estimates based on VLSS93 and VLSS98 (in Government-Donor-NGO Poverty Working Group 1999, 17).

Three quarters of all ethnic minorities live in poverty and ethnic minority women are the most disadvantaged of this group. Only 31% of the Kinh and Chinese are poor. The particular problems of ethnic minority women include very heavy workloads, limited decision-making power within the households with respect to expenditure and reproduction, high levels of domestic violence, and low access to education and knowledge.⁷⁰

Gender disparity also appears in national-level statistics within particular sectors and these disparities are magnified within poor households. For example, in education, inequity exists for girls in upper secondary, vocational and technical, and university education. Disparity also exists in hours worked (including in the home) and income received. As a consequence, as incomes in agriculture have declined relative to other sectors, the sector has become increasingly feminized.

National-level indicators often disguise the wider gender gap in poorer households. For example, national statistics show that primary school enrollment rates reached 92% for boys and 91% for girls in 1998 (see Table 2.2). However, major differences appear when enrollment data are disaggregated by income quintile, ethnic group, and region (see Table 2.3).

The gender gap is also disguised when the household is used as the unit of analysis. Comparisons are commonly made between the well-being of male- and female-headed households as if this represents gender disparities. A gender gap may also appear within

households, especially poor households, where gender inequality is reflected in the difficult decisions over the distribution of scarce resources. In poorer households, women have a marked lower nutritional status than men and the gap is increasing incrementally, even at a national level.⁷¹

National statistics indicate that female-headed households are no worse off than male-headed households and in some cases they may fare much better. However, households in which women are divorced, separated, or widowed, with no adult children at home and who do not receive remittances, are often poor and have a higher incidence of landlessness. In 4 poor provinces, 6–19% of households had little land or were landless and most of these were female-headed households.⁷² By comparison, female-headed households with resident adult males or that receive remittances may be better off than male-headed households that do not receive remittances.

Girls in poorer households are less likely than boys to be sent to school because of the anticipated differential rates of return on investment that are often reinforced in remote areas by social restrictions on female mobility as documented in the Lao Cai Participatory Poverty Assessment.⁷³ For example, in Thai Giang San village, only 20% of eligible children attended school and of those, girls made up only one third. In poor households, food insecurity was the single greatest reason for children's nonattendance at school. Children and especially girls often stay at home or follow their mothers to help in the field. Rates of return on investment in girls' education are seen as low, especially among the Hmong and Han, where girls are viewed as belonging to their future husband's family. The Kinh, Dao, and Nung invest equally in the education of boys and girls, because they believe that their daughters will continue to support them even after they marry.

The same study found that female illiteracy is correlated with remoteness, ethnicity, and poverty. Illiteracy of both men and women is high among ethnic minority households and in most villages it is highest in poor households, where literacy of women is almost nonexistent. In Lai Chai, a remote Phu La ethnic group village, 43% of all households had literate men whereas only 11% had literate women. Of those households defined as poor, 21% had literate males and only 4% had literate females. Levels of literacy among females in remote areas are also lower than for their counterparts in the midlands.

Women in remote areas are doubly disadvantaged in terms of knowledge and education. They lack both formal and informal opportunities to acquire knowledge. This disadvantage is important not only from a social equity point of view but also because women have prime responsibility for childcare and family nutrition and health; thus, investing in women's education contributes to the household's well-being. Women cannot participate in formal education because of the heavy workloads. The lack of electricity also prevents women from benefiting from labor-saving machinery in threshing rice and grinding corn. Women rarely travel outside the village, thus limiting their informal knowledge.

A focus on poverty alleviation, especially among ethnic minority groups, will improve the position of women in the longer term. However, it may not affect their status relative to men in the shorter term or contribute to their empowerment. Relevant education in the vernacular, and access to clean water, power, and transport to markets will directly benefit women. Cultural

impediments to change within the ethnic communities as well as among the Kinh decision makers often block initiatives that could result in greater gender equity. Institutional support for education, health, and political representation is absent from many poor communities.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING

Political Representation and Electoral Process

There is no formal barrier to women's participation in the electoral process and at some levels, women's participation is higher than in neighboring countries (Table 3.6). Representation of women is higher in elected rather than selected positions, suggesting that the community has more confidence in women than in the VCP. It may also indicate that elected positions are less sought after because of their more limited power.

People can stand for election to the People's Council at the commune, district, and provincial levels. From the successful candidates, members of the National Assembly are elected. In contrast, people are selected to VCP committees including the Politburo, the Central Committee and the Control Council. The executive committees of the VCP are more powerful than the National Assembly; they develop resolutions and other official decrees to be adopted by the National Assembly. Therefore, women's participation and influence in these committees are crucial.

Table 3.6: Women in Parliament in Asia, 1997

Country	Women Parliament Members (%)
Viet Nam	26
People's Republic of China	20
Philippines	11
Lao PDR	9
Cambodia	6
Thailand	6

Source: VWU 1997 cited in NCFW 2000, 53.

There has been a strong legislative commitment to women's rights in positions of leadership and decision making. Politburo Resolution 04-ND/TW July 1993 declared that there should be an increase in the number of women in positions of authority in all sectors within VCP committees and the Government. However, this resolution has failed to increase the political representation of women in selection-based committees.

Participation at the Local Level

The number of women elected in the People's Council at the commune, district, and provincial level increased in both 1994 and 1999 (Table 3.7), but remains lower than the proportion of women elected to the National Assembly (Table 3.8). Representation of women in the commune people's committees, which are selected positions, is low and has actually decreased. The proportion of female presidents of people's committees at these levels is also low but increased in the latest election. There is a higher turnover of women than men at this level; thus, the experience of women is not accumulated and their training is not for the long term. The low formal representation of women in local committees hampers their involvement in decision-making processes.

Although there is less political representation in people's committees at the local level, women are active at the grass roots through mass organizations such as the VWU and the Farmer's Union. Women are better represented as leaders in these organizations, occupying 70% of president and vice-president positions from commune to central levels (Table 3.9).

Table 3.7: Women in People's Councils at all Levels (%)

Session	Provincial	District	Commune
1985–1989	29	19	20
1989–1994	12	12	13
1994–1999	20	18	14
1999–2002	22	20	17

Source: National Assembly Office.

Table 3.8 Women in the National Assembly (%)

Term	%
1971–1976	32
1976–1981	27
1981–1986	22
1986–1992	18
1992–1997	19
1997–2002	26

Source: National Assembly Office.

Table 3.9: Women Leaders in Social Organizations (%)

Position	Central	Provincial	District	Commune
President	17	32	57	32
Vice-President	64	42	32	35
Presidency Member	35	43	42	36
Executives	28	42	36	41

Source: Documents of the 7th National Congress of Women's Unions, cited in Phan Thi Thanh 2001, 39.

Participation at the National Level

The proportion of women in elected rather than selected positions increased during 1990s. In 1994, the VCP Central Committee issued Directive 37, which was designed to increase women's participation in political leadership (20% of elected positions should be filled by women). Within the 1997–2002 National Assembly, 26% of members were women, an increase of 8% from the previous term (Table 3.8) and much higher than neighboring countries (see Table 3.6). However, participation of women does not equate to gender-sensitive decision making. Without training to increase their confidence, women's participation may contribute little to ensuring policies are gender sensitive.

In important decision-making committees, women's representation has declined. Until recently, there was one female member of the Politburo, and the Vice President of State and the Vice Chair of the National Assembly were both women. After the Party Congress in 2001, there were no women in the Politburo. The proportion of women in the Central Committee declined slightly but increased in the Control Commission (Table 3.10).

About one tenth of party committee members at the central, provincial, district, and commune level are women. They participate in the social rather than strategic committees including the Committee for Education, Youth, and Children (41%), the Ethnic Council (40%), and the Committee for Social Affairs

(32%), with less representation in the committees for Foreign Affairs (16%), Science and Technology (11%), and Economics and Budget (3%).⁷⁴

Cabinet and Public Service

The proportion of women in leadership positions within the government administration is still very low and falls short of the First Plan of Action targets, with women occupying about 10% of senior positions⁷⁵ (Table 3.11). At the ministerial level, only the Minister of Ministry for Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (MOLISA), and the head of the Committee for Protection and

Care of Children and the National Committee for Population and Family Planning are women. There are no women ministers in major portfolios, such as Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), Ministry of Education and Training, and Ministry of Justice. Women's participation at senior administrative levels remained low during the 1990s.

Table 3.10: Women Representatives in the VCP Central Committee (%)

	Central Committee	Politburo	Control Commission
1996–2001	10.6	5.3	14.3
2001–2006	8.7	-	22.2

Table 3.11: Women in Key Administrative Positions, 1994 and 1997 (%)

Position	1994	1997
Minister	10	11
Vice-Minister	7	7
Department Head	13	12
Department Deputy Head	9	13

Source: National Women's Congress 1994, 1997.

NATIONAL PLANS

Relevant government planning documents include:

- (i) National Socioeconomic Development Strategy to 2010; and
- (ii) Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction Programs and the Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy.

The Socioeconomic Development Strategy to 2010 adopted at the 9th Party Congress held in April 2001 is to accelerate industrialization and modernization along socialist lines so that Viet Nam can become an industrialized nation by 2020. This will be achieved through various mechanisms including the creation of nonfarm employment in rural areas, especially in agribusiness and biotechnology; the promotion of labor-intensive industries for export; the development of an IT industry; and the development of infrastructure, the service sector, and a network of urban centers. The strategy is to maintain the central role of the State in the economy but also to encourage collective and private ownership. It is accepted that the required investment will come from private savings because government savings and foreign direct investment are not expected to increase in the medium term.

It is of concern that gender issues are not prominent in the Socioeconomic Development Strategy. The Strategy neither highlights the potential for women's contribution to development nor presents safeguards to minimize negative impact on women. Several unsuccessful representations were made to the drafting committee by NCFAW including a comprehensive gender analysis of Strategy recommendations, which showed male bias in the new areas of focus on industrial development.

The Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy proposes a three-pronged approach: creating the economic environment and maintaining macroeconomic stability to promote growth; narrowing the gap between regions, and realizing gender equity and the advancement of women; and developing social safety nets for the poor and victims of natural disasters.

The section in the Strategy on gender equality prescribes a number of actions to ensure that women "can carry out their responsibilities and participate fully on an equal basis in all activities, especially in political, economic, cultural and social activities in the industrialization and modernization process." Apart from equal access to the workforce, the Strategy includes measures for equal access to education, health care and family planning services, and to relieve domestic workloads. Also included is the need for awareness campaigns to pursue these goals.

NATIONAL GENDER STRATEGY AND PLAN OF ACTION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN 2001-2005 (POA2)

The National Gender Strategy and Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women 2001-2005 (POA2) is the most important gender-specific strategic planning document. It superseded the National Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women 2005 (POA1). POA2 was drafted by NCFAW following wide consultation and research,⁷⁶ and was approved by the Government in Decision No. 19/2002/QD-TTg of 21 January 2002. It outlines 6 objectives and activities in the areas of employment and economic status for women, education and training, health, leadership and decision-making, women's rights, and strengthening the national machinery (Table A3.1). As an outcome of the POA2, all sectoral departments will be required to prepare gender strategies and plans of action for implementation.⁷⁷

NATIONAL WOMEN'S MACHINERY

National Committee for the Advancement of Women (NCFAW)

The Government established NCFAW in 1993 to promote women's status and enhance their role in nation building. NCFAW officially represented the Government at the Beijing World Conference on Women in 1995. The National Committee for the Women's Decade formed in 1985 in response to the International Decade for Women and the Nairobi Women's Conference preceded this committee. NCFAW has 16 members, who are from organizations such as the VWU and youth and peasant unions, and various government ministries. The President of NCFAW is also President of the VWU and the two Vice-Presidents come from the Ministry of Education and Training and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, respectively. The day-to-day work at the national level is carried out by a standing committee consisting of six people from the VWU, two from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and one each from the Ministry of Finance and Office of Government (Figure A1.1). This committee is externally funded by UNDP, Government of the Netherlands, and other bilateral donors, and assisted by foreign consultants.

NCFAW has become responsible for coordinating implementation of the country's response to the International Platform for Action for Women and the Beijing Declaration signed by the Government in 1996. The first National Action Plan for the Advancement of Vietnamese Women by the Year 2000 was signed by the Prime Minister in October 1997. This Plan has been revised by the government-donor-NGO gender working group and submitted to the Prime Minister. Part of this process was the preparation of a comprehensive situational analysis of four key areas of women's concerns: health and safety, education and training, leadership and decision making, and employment and economic issues.⁷⁸

In 2000, NCFAW prepared the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women 2001–2005 in line with the Beijing Platform for Action for Women. Under this strategy and through a parallel committee structure set up in 1994, committees for the advancement of women (CAWAs) were established at the provincial level and within all line ministries and government committees. Every ministry, branch, and people's committee is required to develop an action plan, which sets out in concrete terms measures to implement the National Plan.

Theoretically, NCFAW is supported by the CFAW network. However, the linkages are not clear. The membership of each CFAW is prescribed by position. Usually members are deputy directors; there may be 18 persons on a part-time basis. This means that members may not have expertise or interest in gender-related policy matters. Furthermore, they do not receive separate funding for their activities (e.g., calling meetings or drafting proposals for requests for training or for ministry-specific plans of action) and consider themselves inadequately resourced.

In MARD, a technical working group (TWG), directly funded by more than 70 donors, assists the CFAW. It was set up in 1999 as a pilot project to assist the development of a sector-specific action plan. The TWG focuses on macro issues (e.g., policy and research, human resource development, and the development of technical guidelines on gender integration into MARD activities), capacity building (e.g., a handbook for rural households and a gender-sensitive curriculum for agriculture extension).

NCFAW has developed a second phase of their project. The overall objective of the second phase is to strengthen the capacity of the national machinery and, using POA2 as the policy instrument, to mainstream gender throughout the other government plans and programs, such as the Socioeconomic Development Strategy and Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy. This may require:

- (i) training within each ministry;
- (ii) leadership training for women candidates for the National Assembly election scheduled for mid-2002 as well as to work with the Fatherland Front to develop more gender-sensitive pre-election procedures;
- (iii) strengthening gender sensitivity of policymakers by integrating a gender perspective into curricula of key political training institutions, such as the Ho Chi Minh National Academy for Political Science; and
- (iv) developing a gender-sensitive database in order to monitor impact and progress through the General Statistics Office (GSO) gender analysis of the multipurpose household surveys.

Viet Nam Women's Union (VWU)

The VWU is a mass organization of the Fatherland Front established in 1930, with more than 11 million members at present (50% of all women aged over 18 years) (Figure A1.2). Its origins were to mobilize women politically in the struggle for independence.

The VWU operates at 4 levels: commune, district, provincial, and national. Every 5 years a National Women's Congress is held at which delegates are elected on the basis of proportional representation. A 15-member presidium oversees the day-to-day operations of the VWU at the central level. Membership requires payment of a fee and participation in community events. This by definition excludes some sections of the population, such as the poor and ethnic minority women who may not speak Vietnamese. As a result, the VWU is not necessarily representative of these groups.

In 1988, Government Decree No 163 instructed all levels of government to consult the VWU on issues concerning women and children, thus giving the VWU a central role. For some, the interpretation of consultation has been extended to include implementation. The result is that since *doi moi* and the inflow of international donor contributions, the role of the VWU has been diverted from one of political mobilization, advocacy, and grassroots activism, to implementation of a wide variety of projects, such as microcredit and microenterprise development schemes, mother and child health and family planning, literacy, agriculture extension, and domestic violence.

International agencies have cooperated with the VWU in implementing these projects because of its reach as a mass organization. However, the implementation of gender-specific programs by the VWU works against the principles of mainstreaming. For example, with microcredit lending, the VWU plays two roles: it provides contact with formal credit channels (e.g., VBARD and the Viet Nam Bank for the Poor) and directs small-scale lending. It is argued by some that the role of the VWU should be to act as an advocate and intermediary for women at the commune level in order to secure loans from formal lending institutions rather than to act as a lending agency whose role is unsustainable.

Strategically, the head of the VWU is also the head of NCFAW. Nevertheless, the linkages between the two institutions should be stronger in order to capitalize on the grassroots capacity of the VWU and the policy-advice role of NCFAW. Both would benefit from stronger linkages with CFAWs within the ministries. Curiously, the VWU was represented at the Beijing World Conference on Women as Viet Nam's main nongovernment organization (NGO).

OTHER GENDER-RELATED ORGANIZATIONS

Apart from the VWU and NCFAW, there are more than 15 government-funded and Vietnamese NGOs directly concerned with gender issues. Among the international community at least 17 international agencies, 10 bilateral donors, and 15 NGOs have gender-related activities (Tables A2.1, A2.2, A2.3, and A2.4). The potential for duplication is enormous. However, this has been mitigated to some extent by the government-donor-NGO gender working group, which meets regularly to share ideas and experiences. To document their various activities, the group produced a joint government-donor strategy that contains a useful matrix specifying how the activities of each body fit with priorities identified in POA2 (Table A3.1).

There are at least two substantial resource libraries on gender: NCFAW Gender Resource Center, which has an extensive collection of gender training materials developed specifically for Viet Nam; and the Center of Family and Women's Studies, which also has an extensive collection of research materials and reports.

Economic growth is good for gender equity in the long run but growth alone does not ensure improvement. Growth that brings gender equality may be slow and uneven. Interventions are necessary in order to minimize long-term disparities as well as short-term risks and shocks. There are important roles for governments, the community, and international donors in (i) removal of discriminatory systemic elements embodied in laws, institutions, market structures, and technology; and (ii) promoting equitable access to and appropriate design of basic services to help households improve their productivity.

Levels of assistance to women can be grouped into three levels, which can be seen as building blocks:

- (i) benefits to women (e.g., of a women's health clinic);
- (ii) improved equity in access (e.g., to education, credit, and entrepreneurial skills training); and
- (iii) empowerment (e.g., a recognized voice in public decision making, family planning, and household expenditure).

Directing benefits to women is perhaps the easiest form of intervention, but the benefits are often undermined by the pooling of benefits within the household, flexibility in the gender division of labor, and reallocation of resources within the household.⁷⁹ Many of the early WID policy recommendations were based on this approach. One cannot have empowerment without benefits to women or equity in access. The approach can be one of targeting and/or mainstreaming. Debate still surrounds these approaches, although mainstreaming is more popular approach.

Improved equity in access and empowerment require a sensitive planning approach. They require changes of existing systems and power structures and may meet with resistance from entrenched male interests. The strategies for improved access and empowerment are based on the principle of mainstreaming, which is fundamental to the GAD approach. Unless there are checks firmly in place within the political system, a reliance solely on mainstreaming as a gender intervention tool may result in the disappearance of gender issues from the agenda

GOVERNMENT PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS

The Government is committed to meeting the requirements set out in POA2 and is using this as the major planning instrument for gender. NCFAW has been charged with responsibility to coordinate the efforts of both government and donors. Ideally, POA2 will be integrated into the Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy, as well as the Government's sector-specific strategies dealing with economic management, rural development, human development, and governance and public administration reform.

NCFAW is coordinating the development of the joint government-donor gender framework, which documents activities of major donors and how they support the POA2; identifies how projects in the pipeline could address the POA2; identifies gaps for further activity (Table A3.1); prevents duplication; and promotes sharing of best practices and lessons learned. For example, the government-donor-NGO gender working group supports the decentralization of project management, which is an increasing orientation of donors. The group has found that this trend, unless carefully monitored, can cause difficulties because women's political representation at the local level is usually less than at the central level.

Although government legislation and policy in the area of gender are strong, a gap is apparent between policy/legislation and implementation because of lack of resources, skills, and time, as well as the reemergence of patriarchal attitudes as the State withdraws from micromanagement of social activities. As noted earlier, implementation of legislation appears to vary according to the personal commitment of the officials involved, and women often face unofficial discrimination.

Although the Government has directed all gender-specific projects to the VWU, some small projects have been implemented by other ministries (e.g., MOLISA's project on trafficking of women and export of labor). Reliance on the VWU to take charge of all gender issues places undue pressure on the VWU. Although the VWU is resourceful, its levels of skill and capacity are inadequate to cover all gender issues at all levels.

OTHER DONOR AND NGO PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS

Most international donors in Viet Nam are committed to supporting gender concerns and have gender equity as a crosscutting strategy. They have moved away from a WID to a GAD approach. This is reflected in a shift of focus from women's projects to mainstreaming gender concerns into all projects⁸⁰ (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: Examples of Gender-specific Donor Projects

Donor	Project
UNDP, Netherlands	Ongoing support to NCFAW
Government of the Netherlands	Mainstreaming gender in the National Institute for Public Affairs and Ho Chi Minh National Political Academy
United Nations Fund for Women	Combating domestic violence against women in Viet Nam.
Canadian International Development Agency	Gender in public spending, Ministry of finance.
Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations/UNDP	Gender analysis of VLSS98.
United Nations Industrial Development Organization	Food processing in the Central Region.
Swedish International Development Agency	Funding training for women in MARD; developed a gender assessment tool.

Source: NCFAW 2001.

In addition, there are some regional projects, which also contribute to POA2. These include a project conducted by the United Nations Fund for Women which focuses on statistics, politics, and technology. UNDP has an interagency project addressing issues of cross-border trafficking in women and children in the Mekong Subregion.

Other donors are keen to support gender-specific activities directly, but their interventions tend to be small and short term. For these interventions to be effective, there is a critical need for coordination, which is currently provided by NCFAW. As a consequence, many donors that contribute to gender-specific activities also support NCFAW, including ADB, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Oxfam Great Britain, Royal Netherlands Embassy (RNE), Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), UNDP, United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), and World Bank (WB).

NGOs have been very active in the area of GAD in Viet Nam for many years. Their projects are usually small and targeted and often better suited than larger projects for dealing with such sensitive issues as gender-based violence. Their activities are numerous, diverse, and widespread. Some of those active in gender issues are listed in Table A2.4.

INTRODUCTION

In 1999, ADB refocused its development mission and made poverty reduction its overarching objective as detailed in the Poverty Reduction Strategy. This strategy is to be pursued through sustainable economic growth, inclusive social development; and good governance for effective policies and institutions. GAD is a crosscutting theme of this strategy, which also forms the basis of ADB's Long-Term Strategic Framework. ADB's enhanced focus on poverty reduction underscores the importance of mainstreaming gender concerns in its operations, because two thirds of the poor in the Asia and Pacific region are women.⁸¹ Equity—especially gender equity—is recognized as a key factor in transforming growth into development and in reducing poverty.⁸²

It follows that gender equity must be addressed in all ADB's core operational areas. Moreover, because poverty is now seen as a deprivation not only of essential assets and opportunities but also of rights, any effective strategy to reduce poverty should empower disadvantaged groups, including women, to exercise their rights and participate more actively in decisions that affect them. This reinforces the approach taken in ADB's Policy on Gender and Development to view women as stakeholders as well as potential beneficiaries in development projects, and to address women's strategic as well as practical needs through gender-sensitive interventions.⁸³

ADB's Policy on Gender and Development adopts mainstreaming as a key strategy for addressing gender equity. Gender is seen as a crosscutting concern affecting all aspects of ADB's operations including macroeconomic and sector work, lending, and assistance programs. To implement the Policy, ADB is also committed to

- (i) provide assistance to its developing member countries in the areas of policy support, capacity building, GAD awareness, and formulation and implementation of policies and programs directed to improving the status of women;
- (ii) facilitate gender analysis of proposed projects, including program and sector loans, and ensure that gender issues are considered at all appropriate stages of the project cycle including identification, preparation, appraisal, implementation, and evaluation;
- (iii) promote increased GAD awareness within ADB through the conduct of training workshops and seminars, development of suitable approaches, and staff guidelines to implement the revised policy;
- (iv) assist its developing member countries to implement commitments made at the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995; and
- (v) explore opportunities to address directly some of the new and emerging issues for women in the Asia and Pacific region, including the feminization of poverty, the phenomenon of

female migrant workers, the disproportionate burden of structural adjustment and economic transition on women, the spread of HIV/AIDS, violence against women, and harmful practices such as trafficking in women and girls.

REVIEW OF PAST ADB OPERATIONS

ADB resumed its operations in Viet Nam in 1993 and prepared a country operational strategy for 1996–2000 in 1995. The guiding principle was sustainable growth with equity. It emphasized policy and institutional reform, social and physical infrastructure development, and environmental and natural resource management. In line with the Government's newly adopted Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy for 2001–2010, the proposed ADB country strategy and program for 2002–2005 focuses on economic growth through rural and private sector development, equalization in human capital endowments through universal lower secondary education, and improved governance with special emphasis on public administration reform.

Gender and Development

ADB's country briefing paper on women and WID strategy (1995)⁸⁴ made four overall recommendations:

- (i) collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data, especially in education;
- (ii) mainstreaming gender considerations within ADB's macroeconomic and sectoral work especially in agriculture;
- (iii) focusing on the formal and informal labor market, education, health, and natural resource management; and
- (iv) supporting selected WID initiatives to assess the specific impact on women of the transition to a more market-based economy.⁸⁵

Recommendations for each sector were:

- (i) **Agriculture:** to increase the participation of women in the policy debate, consider women in project design, improve access to credit by poor women, and consider women's access to land and secondary benefits under the new Land Law.
- (ii) **Social infrastructure:** to improve water and sanitation facilities, consult women to assess user needs, increase women's participation in nonprimary education, encourage women in management of health services, and encourage the use of contraceptives.
- (iii) **Economic planning and management:** to provide support to the Government to mainstream gender concerns into development policies, plans and activities.

- (iv) **Environment:** encourage women to participate in land-use planning and social forestry, and to consider the potential for community fuel wood plantations and appropriate technologies.

Other recommendations included a study of the informal sector, gender sensitization of the State Planning Committee (now Ministry of Planning and Environment) and women's bureaus, strengthening capacity within the VWU and women's bureaus within ministries to produce a range of training materials, strengthen gender responsiveness in the GSO, support the outcomes of the Beijing World Conference on Women, and include WID in ADB's regular policy dialogues.

Although the strategy was thorough and comprehensive, it postdated the design of many ongoing loan projects, which have been very slow to reach implementation.⁸⁶ Many of the earlier projects lacked attention to differential impact on male and female beneficiaries. However, it is encouraging that a clear transition with respect to gender considerations is identifiable, reflecting the effectiveness of the recommendations of the 1995 WID strategy, even though not all the recommendations were taken up and some were thwarted by operational obstacles. Progress is particularly noticeable in infrastructure projects, in which gender issues historically have been seen as having little relevance.

Policy-based Projects

The current discourse in GAD argues that every project has gender impact and conversely no project is gender neutral.⁸⁷ The tendency, however, is to limit gender analysis to community-based projects (e.g., health, education, microcredit, and water and sanitation) where the impact is more direct, and on projects targeted to gender concerns (e.g., strengthening gender analysis capacity within a ministry). ADB project designs for financial reform, agriculture policy, public sector reform, legal reform, and promotion of the private sector in Viet Nam, as well as projects focused at the national and supranational level, have to date rarely mentioned gender concerns. These areas are considered to be gender neutral. However, policies do have a differential impact on women and men and gender relations. Failure to recognize these differences may compromise the effectiveness of the policies.⁸⁸

Examples of the gender impact of policy change include state-owned enterprise reforms that made women redundant at a faster rate than men, public expenditure reforms that withdrew funding from preschool education, and reforms in international trade that favor male-dominated industries. To date, the gender impact of these policy reforms has not been well documented. New research is being developed and funded by UNDP in Viet Nam and as this research matures, gender considerations will be more easily integrated.

ADB's policy-based lending has focused on agriculture and finance. The first loan resulted in liberalization of agriculture inputs and outputs, land tenure reform, and rural finance. The second established the legal, regulatory, and supervisory framework for banking. Little focus was directed to the gender implications of these policy changes.

Infrastructure Projects

The gender implications of such infrastructure projects as port development; power transmission, transport, and water supply and sanitation are now widely documented. A common disadvantage to women occurs when resettlement is necessary. Due to women's limited legal rights, resettlement is often inequitable. Early infrastructure projects funded by ADB in Viet Nam also suffered from limited attention to the differential gender impact. For example, the early projects on port development, power distribution rehabilitation, and urban water supply and sanitation paid little attention to gender considerations.

The Fisheries Infrastructure Improvement Project was reviewed as part of a study on gender sensitivity of projects.⁸⁹ The project was to build port facilities for fishers and on-land handlers (75% of whom are women). The report found that the design did not accurately capture women's role as on-land handlers, icemakers, and sellers. The potential impact on male and female beneficiaries was not made explicit. Benefits intended to accrue to women were not supported by any special interventions and this resulted in unrealized potential of women within the project. The report concluded that there was a need for a broader focus on poverty, environment, and diversification. Women displaced by the project could be supported to develop other enterprises. This would require identification of opportunities, access to targeted and expanded microfinance, and the development of alternative livelihood skills and training in conservation awareness.

Projects designed more recently have given greater attention to gender. For example, a project on water supply and sanitation has recognized women as the major collectors of water and a strategic role has been given to the VWU as a member of the central steering committee. The VWU has the responsibility for community consultation, provision of information and education, and negotiation of small loans to enable the poor to meet the costs of the tertiary connection from the trunk water line. Technical assistance to evaluate the effectiveness of involving the VWU showed positive results, although it was identified that the VWU would require further training in reporting requirements.

The building of major transport networks has very clear gender impact. The long-term impact can be positive through women's improved access to markets, health clinics, and schools; and cheaper, more comfortable, and shorter travel times. Simultaneously, negative impact, such as loss of land and runoff flows in agriculture fields, needs to be assessed and mitigated.

More subtle gender impact occurs during the construction phase, but does not become obvious until the project is completed. For example, the building of a major highway brings migrant men and truck drivers into a local community. Although these men have money that they use to buy local produce from women traders, they also have limited social networks. Often they participate in unprotected commercial sex, potentially contributing to the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS into these communities. Highways and transport corridors may also facilitate the trafficking of women and competition for land use, which have negative impact on the productive capacity of women.

Any major infrastructure project should be designed with gender concerns in mind and strategies for alleviating the negative social impact, especially on women (e.g., awareness

campaigns on road safety, the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS, and the techniques and dangers of trafficking of women and children). The East-West Corridor and the Phnom Penh-Ho Chi Minh City Highway projects are good examples of gender sensitivity in infrastructure projects design. The East-West Corridor project addresses gender issues at various levels including support for relevant policy, legislation, and programs coordinated by government agencies. Technical assistance has been approved to develop information, education, and communication plans to prevent HIV/AIDS among migrant workers and women, especially sex workers, and to prevent trafficking of women and children.

Community-based Projects

Community-based projects have been the main arena for gender-sensitive projects. Projects in health and education easily lend themselves to a focus on gender. However, in some community-based ADB projects in which gender considerations are central, the project performance report does not require reporting on gender impact.

Projects on population and family health in Viet Nam provide good examples of gender-focused projects. These projects were designed to improve provincial health services and facilities. A number of gender-related objectives were specified and have been monitored and evaluated against the baseline of sex-disaggregated data. The problems around gender issues were not with design but implementation. More concern by health workers was shown for population control than for women's health. The lesson learned is that change agents need new attitudes and knowledge interfaced with technical training. Such projects also pointed to the need for technical assistance on reproductive health with a focus on reproductive tract infections and anemia and their causes. It was found that excessive problems of this nature arose from invasive strategies of population control, such as intra-uterine device insertion, abortions, menstrual regulation, and female sterilization.

The education and training sector has received long-standing attention from gender specialists. The Lower Secondary Education project, the Teacher Training project, and the Vocational and Technical Education project have all articulated gender concerns and reporting requirements on gender. However, they mainly focus on quantifiable areas such as enrollment rates of girls. Attention should also be given to qualitative assessments of the gender sensitivity of new curricula and materials. Within the Vocational and Technical Education project there is a focus on 15–19 year olds and women in particular (40% of beneficiaries should be women). The project intends to introduce measures to correct gender-related disadvantage, to recruit young women to VTE, establish training centers specifically for women, develop special teacher training courses to reduce gender biases in VTE, and deliver targeted career guidance and placement for girls.

Projects that focus on rural credit are also potentially powerful interventions for the empowerment of women. However, to date little attention has been paid to gender in either targeting or monitoring the impact of credit schemes. Attention is given to the household rather than the differential impact within the household. With male-headed households the argument is often made that the household will benefit from the credit and both husband and wife must sign the loan agreement. In the report and recommendation to the ADB President of the Rural Credit project, some fleeting references were made to assisting “the poor, including women.” This

project was designed to increase incomes of the rural people and expand productive employment by increasing the supply of short- and medium-term credit and to strengthen the rural financial system. No monitoring of the differential impact of lending to male- or female-headed households was conducted or lending to women per se. Furthermore, no support services were offered to either female-headed households or women in general to increase their access and absorptive capacity of credit. As a consequence, no monitoring of the impact on women has been conducted. Projects that offer rural credit are extremely complex. Nevertheless, research conducted by the World Bank indicates that there are real issues with respect to the differential gender impact of rural credit.⁹⁰

Even at the community-based level, unless policies are gender sensitive, they may benefit the household without contributing toward women's economic and overall empowerment. For example, credit offered to women without support services for business skills formation may push women into traditional forms of production, thus contributing to an exacerbated gender gap.

Further consideration of gender issues is recommended for the recently approved Rural Enterprise Finance project, because it does not apply a gender lens. Gender empowerment is even more critical for this project because it aims to address constraints in the financial system, which hinders channeling of funds to small and medium enterprises.

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although few ADB loans in Viet Nam have been completed, a number of lessons can be drawn from their experience. The first lesson is to acknowledge the commitment by both ADB and the executing agencies to gender concerns. For ADB's policy on GAD to be successful, it is critical that gender impact assessments are conducted, and that gender performance indicators are set prior to loan approval and subsequently reported during implementation.

Project Design and Implementation

Competing demands for time and resources often result in lack of attention to gender issues. Experience has shown that often only lip service is paid to gender issues: a paragraph or only a phrase is inserted into the project documents, suggesting that gender concerns have been taken into consideration. Working with poor women is challenging because of their lack of literacy, information, land, labor, credit, and entrepreneurial skills. Projects will take longer until these gaps are narrowed. Gender is not always conceived as integral to the project and limited or no funds are allocated for gender-specific initiatives. It is a topic easily ignored in quarterly project performance reports. The following recommendations should be implemented to address these issues.

- Benefits of including gender concerns should be clearly articulated in each project design and simple reporting frameworks developed. This will require the strengthening of gender analysis among stakeholders.
- Gender concerns should be strategically integrated into the prefeasibility, design, implementation, and evaluation phases of a project. Monitoring should include an initial gender impact assessment that specifies GAD performance indicators to be included in

reports. This will require strengthening of gender sensitivity and gender analytical capacity in both male and female officials in the implementing and executing agencies.

- All data in projects should be disaggregated by sex on a continuous basis where possible (e.g., in the baseline, reporting, and evaluations). These data should include, inter alia, the gender division of labor in production and reproduction, differential access to land, credit, training and information, and contribution to decision making.
- Gender-sensitive social and cultural analysis of women's economic, social, and political status should be required in the design of all projects, especially those that deal with women's access to resources and services.
- Adequate resources should be allocated in technical assistance projects to ensure that gender concerns are systematically assessed and appropriately integrated in project design.
- Expectations of ADB and the executing agencies regarding the implementation period of projects and the measurable outcomes should be adjusted to coincide with the capacity of the target group to absorb assistance. Opportunities for building women's capacity should be harnessed within every project.

Consultation and Capacity Building

Inadequate time is currently allocated to consult women beneficiaries during project design, implementation, and evaluation. Commonly, women in rural areas are excluded from daytime consultations because they are in the fields. Few women are members of local institutions, such as the people's committees that provide the interface for project consultations. Furthermore, women's participation in initial consultation does not ensure representation of the diverse views of women or empowerment of women within households and the community. Women's voices are not necessarily heard nor are they always representative. For example, VWU may not adequately represent the views of ethnic minority women.

Training may be inappropriately targeted. Assumptions are often made that men are the major decision makers and should be the target group for training. Women are playing an increasing role but training opportunities elude them. Training in rural areas is often conducted at long distances from the home or during the day when women are working in the fields, in both cases limiting the participation of women. In rural small and medium enterprise development projects, training may be offered to women without ensuring access to resources of land, labor, and credit, resulting in limited application. The following recommendations should be implemented to address these issues.

- Women's views are more likely to be included if consultation occurs with representatives of mass organizations; women occupy 75% of leadership positions at the commune level in the VWU and the Farmer's Union. However, in remote areas in particular, consultation should be as broad as possible.

- Those involved in the consultation process should be sensitized to hearing and recording women's voices. Women should be trained in how to identify and articulate their needs in a public forum.
- Training should be offered in a gender-sensitive context to maximize the participation of women and their capacity to apply the knowledge gained. Consideration should be given to mobile training units, and training should be coupled with access to such resources as credit.

Indirect Impact on Women

In many large infrastructure projects, limited attention has been given to associated socioeconomic problems. Such problems may destroy income-earning opportunities in the informal sector and also create problems such as the spread of HIV/AIDS among women, trafficking of women and girls, migrant women workers, and violence against women.

- Attention should be given to mitigating the negative socioeconomic impact of infrastructure project development on local communities.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES FOR FUTURE ADB OPERATIONS

The gender situational analysis identified a number of areas of disadvantage to women. Three strategic and increasing areas in which ADB has capacity to assist are agriculture and rural development, socially inclusive development, and governance.

Agriculture and Rural Development

Women are concentrating in less dynamic sectors such as rice production and have not pursued diversification. They are less involved in small and medium nonfarm enterprises in the productive and services sectors that generate greater income than smaller trading activities and agriculture. They are disadvantaged by lack of access to credit, production, and entrepreneurial skills training, and lack time because of their domestic responsibilities.

Socially Inclusive Development

Lower participation of girls in secondary, especially upper secondary education and VTE, has reduced their options to participate fully in the economy. Furthermore, although the gender gaps in enrollments are decreasing, recent evidence suggests a decline in the total time spent by girls in secondary school. Better education leads to labor force participation, better control of contraception and fertility, and the ability to switch to nonfarm rural activities, especially for the poor. At lower levels of income, closing gender gaps in education and status helps to alleviate the worst manifestations of poverty—high infant mortality rate and child malnutrition.

Governance

In the public domain, women's participation in policy development in the political and public service arenas has declined. With increased decentralization of project management, the

lack of women's representation will become increasingly problematic. In the private domain, it has become clear that domestic violence and women's lack of input into family planning decisions are issues of concern. Interventions into the private domain are probably best suited to NGOs and bilateral donors. However, ADB project designs should be cognizant of these issues. ADB interventions may contribute indirectly because as women's economic position within the household improves, their status and decision-making power also improves.

As mentioned, gender disparities are exacerbated among the poor, who are concentrated in rural areas and include ethnic minorities, those with low levels of capital, and those exposed to external shocks caused by natural or personal disasters. In order to target the poor better, the geographical focus of ADB's activities should be within the poorer regions, especially the Central Highlands and North Central Coast, and within those regions the focus should be on the poorest households, which are often those of ethnic minorities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADB'S GENDER STRATEGY

Based on the three areas of disadvantage identified above (agriculture and rural development, the social sector, and governance), the Government's priorities, and ADB's proposed country strategy and program, the following strategic directions for addressing gender equity are recommended.

- (i) In its operations in support of **agriculture and rural development**, ADB should strive to create a level playing field for men and women in the diversification of agriculture production and the development of rural enterprises through a focus on equal access to agriculture inputs, extension services, skills training, and productive resources such as land and credit.
- (ii) In its operations in the **social sector**, ADB should ensure that gender equity and empowerment are promoted through equal access to secondary education and VTE that is not gender segregated. By promoting accessible health care and its equitable financing, ADB will also be primarily benefiting women, given their greater dependence on health services during their reproductive years.
- (iii) In the area of **governance**, ADB should contribute to gender mainstreaming in all government policies and programs through support for gender capacity building to relevant government agencies and ensuring that all ADB assistance is gender inclusive. The focus should be on ensuring that civil service and public administration reform does not adversely affect women and that the reforms undertaken support the Government's gender mainstreaming goals.

These three strategic directions not only create benefits for women, but also provide greater equity in access to resources and services, and the empowerment of women within both the public and private domain.

ISSUES, APPROACHES, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADB'S PROPOSED PROGRAM OF ASSISTANCE

The proposed approach is the mainstreaming of gender considerations into ADB projects, with particular attention in the following areas: agriculture and rural development, promotion of small and medium enterprises, secondary education, health services and financing, and reform of public administration. The routine conduct of gender analysis will be actively promoted in the design stage to ensure that women's needs are met and more effectively integrated. Collection of sex-disaggregated data will be required at both the design and monitoring and evaluation stages. Special components and mechanisms to facilitate the involvement of women will be designed and resources allocated to ensure tangible benefits to women. Where feasible, women will be identified as a distinct target group. Lessons learned from previous projects will be used to inform project design and implementation, consultation, and capacity building.

Agriculture and Rural Development

ADB assistance will be designed to be responsive to women's roles, priorities, and needs, and to ensure equal access to resources such as seeds, fertilizers, information, new technology, and extension services. Women's distinct role and responsibilities in the sustainable utilization of natural resources, as key resource users and managers, will be supported. For example, community awareness programs will be developed with women as a specific target group; women will be actively encouraged to participate in land-use planning, social forestry, and other income-earning opportunities; and provision will be made for women's access to and control over natural resources. Poverty reduction initiatives will include a focus on reducing female poverty. Possible approaches that will be explored include development of strategies to increase and enhance women's employment prospects in the informal sector, promotion of rural nonfarm employment and income-generating opportunities, and provision of greater access to credit. Community-based livelihood projects to address food security, crop and livestock diversification, and microfinance will be developed, with poor women as a target group. A geographic focus on the poorer regions of the Central Highlands and North Central Coast will maximize the impact on gender equity and development.

The following gender issues need to be considered.

- Agriculture is being feminized as males turn to nonfarm labor.
- Women take the major responsibility for agriculture and work longer hours than men in agriculture and caring for family, especially in the ethnic minority communities.
- With the current division of labor, women have little time for committee work.
- Women are not adequately represented on the local people's committees—ethnic minority women are not adequately represented by the VWU; most do not speak Vietnamese and, therefore, will not be incorporated easily within consultations and decision making.

- Men still make the major decisions concerned with agriculture and land use, but the role of women in decision making is increasing.
- Women participate in only a limited number of agriculture extension programs.
- Land-use certificates are often in the name of husbands only although wives should be included according to new law.
- The division of labor by gender in rural industries is flexible, which creates competition between men and women and allows men to more easily capture benefits intended for women.
- Rural employment in small private firms is not covered by the Labor Code.
- Access to resources, equipment, and skills training is dominated by men.
- New technologies are not aimed to ease women's agriculture responsibilities.
- Rural women lack vocational training, which contributes to their lack of marketable and entrepreneurial skills to develop small and medium enterprises.
- Trade is a woman's activity, but women have difficulty accessing large loans.
- Women's mobility is more restricted than that of men, limiting women's access to markets.
- Women have limited access to credit because they are unable to provide collateral; also there is a tendency toward male bias among staff of rural lending institutions.
- VBARD loans that do not need collateral require commune leaders to act as guarantor—women have little influence here.
- Women's access to microcredit through the VWU is often tied to acceptance of other schemes, such as family planning and literacy programs.
- Application procedures for loans are complex and women lack confidence to apply for credit.

Gender interventions or gender-inclusive design could include the following:

- Provide training for women regarding rights, opportunities, and options for formal banking.
- Provide additional training in animal husbandry and subsistence farming for existing women agriculture officers.

- Make better use of in situ and indigenous knowledge systems.
- Make full use of technology options, e.g., choose species, plantation designs, and management practices that enhance gender equity and development.
- Establish women's cooperatives for nonfarm labor.
- Encourage the reissue of land-use certificates in the name of both spouses, according to the 2000 Law on Marriage and Family.
- Diversify women's access to higher-value commodities, such as fruit trees, mushrooms, fish, livestock, and processed goods.
- Support for livestock and retail sale enterprises, which may benefit women unless reallocation of household activities occurs.
- Make available to women microcredit and larger loans together with supportive services for new marketable skills (including information about the Enterprise Law and assistance in designing and marketing, counseling, and conducting feasibility studies for proposed microenterprises, skills development, and management).
- Provide gender sensitization training for staff of lending institutions.
- Review and enforce the no-mortgage policy of VBARD and Viet Nam Bank for the Poor.
- Establish credit guarantee funds as substitutes for collateral.
- Offer incentive schemes to increase access to financial services for women, e.g., through bank accounts opened and managed by women, and installment lending.

Technical assistance could focus on the impact of agriculture diversification and development of nonfarm employment opportunities within the household. The study could determine the gender impact of the shift to nonfarm labor, viable enterprise opportunities for women, and the gender impact of commercializing agriculture and liberalizing trade. Further technical assistance on the socioeconomic concerns of rural credit may be useful.

Socially Inclusive Development

The focus will be on improving access to and retention rates in secondary schooling and VTE for girls, especially poor and ethnic minority girls and women. ADB projects will explore the potential for fellowships, application of affirmative actions principles, stipends, and targets. Girls' entry into nontraditional fields, such as science, technology, and vocational and technical courses, will be supported through priority access to VTE and appropriate curricula.

The major gender issues for consideration include the following:

- Women need equal access to educational opportunities to be full participants in society.

- Girls have lower enrollment rates and years of schooling (attainment) in secondary, especially upper secondary education, and VTE. There is some indication that the gender gap in total years of schooling in secondary education is increasing.
- Girls from ethnic minority areas are disadvantaged with respect to education due to the higher opportunity costs of sending them to school, their young age of marriage (sometimes 13–14 years old), their longer hours of work, and parental resistance to allowing them to travel long distances to school or to attend boarding school. The education curriculum taught in Vietnamese is often thought to be irrelevant to their needs.
- The disadvantage for girls in poor households is exacerbated; under budget constraints, males are given preference for education.
- Clear gender segregation occurs when subject selection is permitted, with girls opting for social science rather than technical subjects. Girls need a technical focus in order to compete in the broader economy.
- Curricula at all levels exhibit strong gender bias and gender stereotypes in content and images.
- Although most primary school teachers are women, most principals are men.
- The gender balance alters toward male bias in upper levels of education.
- The presence of women in higher-level and decision-making positions can raise the aspirations of girls and young women and positively influence social attitudes toward women.

Recommendations for gender interventions include the following:

- Monitor female enrollment, retention, and attainment.
- Increase physical accessibility to secondary schools in remote areas through better roads and more schools; consider different forms of distance education; and establish single-gender boarding facilities.
- Remove financial barriers to girls' attendance at school in disadvantaged areas.
- Review curricula to make noncore subjects more suited to the needs of ethnic minorities.
- Mobilize grassroots organizations and government extension workers to raise awareness of the need to educate girls and for a more equitable gender balance in hours worked.
- Encourage and support the training of local female teachers and provide extension and continuing education programs for marginally qualified women teachers.

- Offer scholarships/stipends for girls to enter VTE, especially in agriculture and information technology.
- Conduct campaigns within educational institutions to challenge assumptions on sex segregation in elected subjects, and offer career counseling using successful female role models.
- Establish quota systems or stipends to encourage female participation in science and technology subjects.
- Review curriculum materials with the aim of eliminating gender stereotyping.
- Introduce gender as a specific subject in all training for primary and VTE teachers.
- Introduce quota systems or implement affirmative action plans for women teachers in secondary schools and VTE, supported by training in education management.
- Involve NGOs to encourage community participation in school management committees.
- Encourage gender and education research, especially on the reasons for dropouts and repetition.

Potential technical assistance in the area might include a study into social and economic factors affecting gender-specific aspects of secondary school and VTE enrollment, dropout, attrition, and graduation rates among girls/women.

Governance

The challenge for ADB is to ensure that public sector reform does not adversely affect women. Support for governance reform, especially in the public sector, will be designed to be gender inclusive. The POA2 goals of gender mainstreaming in sectoral ministries—through the review of skills mix and requirements, and policy and planning procedures—will be supported directly or indirectly. Future support for public sector reforms will be developed with attention to possible gender impact and its mitigation.

Mainstreaming of gender issues requires integrating gender-specific policy recommendations into relevant mainstream policy documents as well as sector-specific strategies. In 2001, technical assistance was approved to support the work of the CFAW in MARD. Assuming this project is positively evaluated, it could be used as a benchmark project of ADB that could be replicated in other ministries, such as the Ministry of Planning and Investment as the major coordinating agency of overseas development assistance.

A technical assistance project entitled Gender Strategy and Implementation Plan for Agriculture and Rural Development was to commence in 2002. The aim is to assist MARD's TWG to develop a strategy and sustainable implementation framework for mainstreaming gender considerations into its strategies, policies, programs, and projects at all levels and stages of its

operations. This project has been delayed. It is recommended that ADB update its understanding of the functions of the TWG before beginning the project, because TWG has gone through many changes in the interim.

The role of CFAWs within ministries and branches also needs clarification. Their role in the long term is to provide gender-sensitive advice in the interests of mainstreaming as part of their everyday activities. The intention was not that they implement separate projects. Funding is supposed to be allocated from within each ministry's budget; to date only 70% have budgets. Enhanced roles for the CFAWs include development and implementation of the ministry-specific POA2 activities as well as monitoring gender components of government and donor policy and projects within their ministry.

ADB loans should include gender-capacity building components, because most loans include capacity building. This is strongly recommended in loans where successful implementation requires gender-specific capacity. Training will be necessary for both executing and implementing agencies. (The NCFW Gender Resource Center has a wealth of off-the-shelf training programs designed specifically for Viet Nam, which are freely available.) The goal of ADB is not to train gender specialists but to make sector specialists gender sensitive. This approach is not only consistent with the policy of mainstreaming and gender as a crosscutting issue, but also it avoids isolating women in positions with limited career paths and remuneration.

Gender and governance issues include the following:

- Gender imbalance exists in various levels of political representation.
- There are gender biases in legislation and planning documents.
- Women often lack confidence and capacity, which limits their participation in policy development.
- There is reluctance to take gender issues seriously in planning committees.
- Insufficient research on the gender impact of macropolicies has been carried out.

Recommendations for gender interventions include the following:

- Carry out gender-capacity building in implementing and executing agencies.
- Include gender impact research in all policy design.
- Assist CFAWs to meet their requirements, and to produce a POA2 through training.
- Promote leadership programs for young women from government, NGOs, and business.
- Conduct gender impact assessments to ensure that civil service and public administration reform does not adversely affect women and that the reforms undertaken support the Government's gender mainstreaming goals.

The Government has made impressive progress toward narrowing the gender gap according to a number of national indicators. Benefits for women are seen in, for example, increased income and the establishment of women's health clinics. Access to productive resources and services such as education and general health care has also improved. In some areas, women's empowerment may have increased, but it has decreased in other areas, especially in political representation. There is little evidence to suggest that women, especially rural and ethnic minority women, have become empowered. The high levels of domestic violence and the lack of decision making by women regarding family planning suggest that within the family at least, women have not experienced significant empowerment.

These findings show that gender inequity is more significant in Viet Nam than national statistics indicate. The impressive levels of many indicators in health and education, for example, overshadow some of the incremental yet real dynamics of change in some of these indicators. The country is in transition from a command to socialist market economy and with this comes new relations to productive resources. Strategically important economic sectors include the new enterprise development in the private sector, the associated access to secondary schooling and VTE, and access to political decision making through more independent committee structures at all levels.

Doi moi has been in operation for just over 10 years; the long-term gender impact of reforms is not yet clear. Furthermore, problems exist with the quality of the data, especially in rural and remote areas, and this is critical when changes are incremental. Data are unreliable due to problems of collection (i.e., some areas are inaccessible and some populations are too small to be represented adequately). Some indicators reveal changes in benefits and access, but benefits and participation do not ensure empowerment or compliance with legislation.

The Government is committed to gender issues through a top-down approach of legislation and policy formation. However, caution is required as the State withdraws from the daily lives of people, because gender disparities may increase if unchecked. Also, it appears that gender issues are being subsumed under a poverty reduction focus. For example, the recent Socioeconomic Development Plan for 2010 makes no specific mention of gender. The concern is that gender mainstreaming without rigorous policies and checks in place may undermine or reverse progress to date.

It is clear that as nonfarm rural enterprise is becoming more economically attractive, women are being left behind in the less dynamic agriculture sector with less access to extension services. Women have been less inclined to diversify agriculture production in order to increase their income-earning capacity. Impediments such as access to credit and entrepreneurial skills exist. Women also are less successful in establishing small and medium enterprises in the formal sector and concentrate in informal sector activities of trade and handicraft production. Women are disadvantaged due to lack of resources including labor time, management skills, and knowledge about the market, networks, and credit. The fact that most rural women work twice as long as men (in agriculture and household duties) is a major constraint on their capacity to capitalize or undertake business opportunities. In addition, limited access to credit forces them into the

informal market. This may be because the loans required are smaller and/or the status of women as borrowers is less.

Agriculture has limited capacity to absorb more labor and a crisis is developing around both the shortage and increasing fragmentation of household land. A recent trend among younger women, at least among the Kinh, is to join their male counterparts in leaving the countryside in search of employment. Job opportunities for young women as housekeepers, in restaurants, and street trading have increased in urban areas. The growth of textile and clothing industries among state, private, and foreign-invested enterprises has also provided new employment opportunities for young women.

For women to participate fully in economic development, education is critical. There is a direct relationship between poverty and low levels of education. Differentials in access to education for boys and girls are higher among the poor and the differences are exacerbated at the higher education levels. Limited access to VTE and technical subjects in higher education may reduce the ability of women to participate more fully in technical fields.

Women have a greater individual demand for health services because of their reproductive role and the high incidence of infection from intrusive methods of population control. When the user-pays principle was introduced into Viet Nam, the poor were reluctant to use health services and withdrew into self-treatment with nonprescribed medicines. An associated impact was that women bore the burden of taking care of sick children and the elderly in the home.

The Government is beginning to deal with such sensitive issues as gender-based violence and women trafficking, and is increasing the choice of contraception in order to reduce the extremely high rate of abortion, the low level of use of condoms, and the spread of HIV/AIDS. These issues require sensitive handling. ADB can contribute to the alleviation of these problems at the policy and legislative level, and include their consideration in health projects and as standard safety measures for all projects, especially road construction.

Three strategic directions, which impinge on a number of ongoing and proposed projects, are identified as focal points for ADB's gender activities:

- Encourage women to participate in agriculture diversification and rural enterprise development.
- Improve gender equity and empowerment through equal access to secondary education and VTE.
- Develop gender-sensitive policy that both empowers women and improves their access and benefits.

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APPENDIX 1

STRUCTURE OF GENDER ORGANIZATIONS IN VIET NAM

Figure A1.1: Organization of the National Committee for the Advancement of Women in Viet Nam (NCAW)

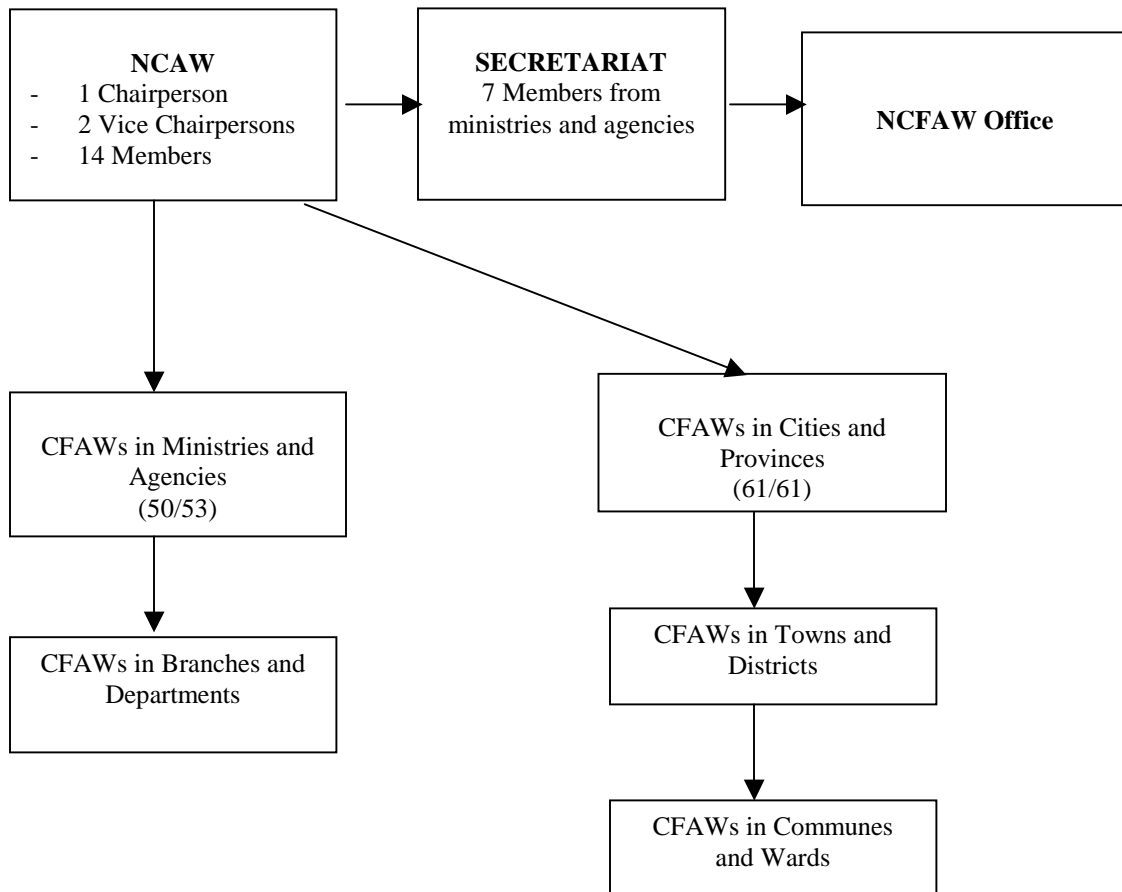
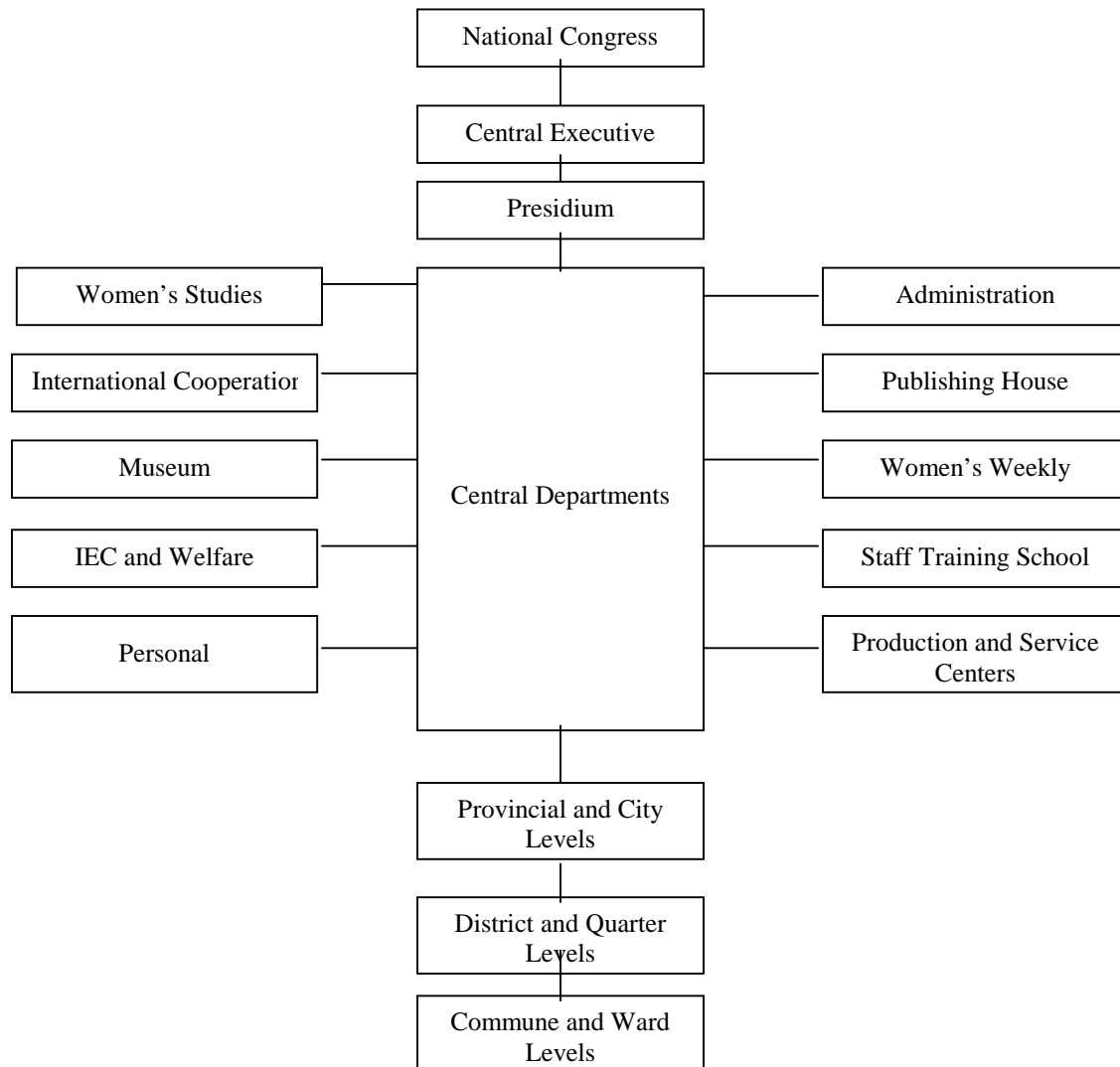


Figure A1.2: Structure of the Viet Nam Women’s Union



APPENDIX 2

LIST OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

Table A2.1: Government of Viet Nam Gender-related Organizations

Name	Role
Viet Nam Women's Union	Mass organization of Fatherland Front
NCFAW	Government policy advice
Center for Family and Women's Studies, National Center for Social Science and Humanity	Research on gender issues
Center for Education Promotion and Empowerment for Women	Empowerment through capacity building
Center for Reproductive and Family Health	Medical research on women's health
Center for Research on Female Labor (MOLISA)	Research on women's labor
Board for Women's Affairs of Viet Nam, General Federation of Trade Unions	Advocate group for female labor
Center for Women's Studies, Viet Nam National University	Research and training on women's issues
Institute of Sociology	Research on social issues
Research Center for Gender, Family, and Environment in Development	Research and training from an interdisciplinary perspective
Socioeconomic Development Center	Research and consultancies on many issues including gender
Toward Ethnic Women	Small-scale projects with ethnic women
Women's Studies Faculty, Open University, HCMC	Teaching and research on gender issues
Center for Family and Women's Studies, Institute for Social Sciences	Research on gender issues
Institute for Social Science of Ho Chi Minh City	Research on gender issues

Table A2.2: International Organizations Working on Gender Issues

Name	Role
International Labour Organization	Equality of opportunity and treatment
International Organization for Migration	Humane and orderly migration
Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS	AIDS awareness
United Nations Children's Fund	Integrated projects
United Nations Development Programme	Gender-sensitive program and projects
United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization	Literary education of ethnic women and girls
United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization	Capacity building
United Nations Fund for Population Activities	Implementation of Cairo Plan of Action 1994
United Nations International Drug Control Programme	Gender-sensitive drug control

Name	Role
United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR)	Repatriation of refugees
United Nations Industrial Development Organisation	Women in industrial development
United Nations Development Fund for Women	Improving the status of women
United Nations Volunteers	Volunteer organization
World Food Programme	Women's well-being
World Health Organization	Women's well-being
World Bank	Women in development
Asian Development Bank	Improving the status of women

Table A2.3: Bilateral Donors Involved in Gender and Women's Issues

Name
Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID)
Canadian International Development Agency
Danish International Development Agency
Department for International Development
Government of Finland
Japanese Government
Netherlands Government
Royal Embassy of Belgium
Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation
Swedish International Development Agency

Table A2.4: International NGOs and Other Organizations Involved in Gender and Women's Activities

Name	Role
Gender and Development Working Group	Informal government-donor-NGO coalition
NGO Resources Center	Holds resources on gender
CARE International in Viet Nam	
Catholic Relief Fund	
Coopération Internationale pour le Développement et la Solidarité (CIDSE)	
Ford Foundation	Private international donor
Friedrich Ebert Stiftung	Private German foundation
Oxfam Great Britain	
Oxfam Hong Kong, China	
Population and Development International	
Radda Barnen (Save the Children Sweden)	
Save the Children (UK)	
Save the Children (Australia)	
Pathfinder	Reproductive health
Action Aid	

APPENDIX 3

DONOR PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS

Table A3.1: Objectives and Activities of POA2, and the activities of ADB and other Donors

POA2 Objectives and Activities	ADB Activities	Other Donors' Major Activities
1. Employment and Economic Status		
1.1 Employment and Poverty Reduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central Highlands Livelihood Improvement and Integrated Natural Resources Management (Forestry) (loan) • Rural Infrastructure (loan) • Power Distribution (loan) 	<p>FAO: Formulation of an agriculture research master plan, policy, and strategy for sustainable national food security; technical support for the 5-million hectare reforestation program; national strategy for aquatic animal quarantine; strengthening capacity for renewal of rural policy development, and area-wide integration of specialized crop and livestock activities.</p> <p>WB: Poverty Reduction and Structural Credit (PRSC) and a study on the impact of trade liberalization on the poor, including women; technical assistance on a workers' redundancy program for state-owned enterprises; Northern Mountains Poverty Reduction; Community-based Rural Infrastructure, Rural Transport.</p> <p>CIDA: Improved livelihoods for mountainous communities, membership in MPDF.</p> <p>UNDP: globalization (equitable management of globalization), poverty (partnerships to fight poverty), public service delivery and PAR, promoting an enabling business environment, sustainable financing for development.</p>
1.2 Workers' Protection		UNDP: Promoting an enabling business environment (see 1.1)

POA2 Objectives and Activities	ADB Activities	Other Donors' Major Activities
1.3 Vocational Training and Economic Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural Credit project • Second Red River Basin Sector project • Forestry Sector project 	<p>FAO: Gender equity in the administration of the Land Law; cultivation of edible mushrooms; aquaculture development in northern uplands; biomass energy development; formulation of an agriculture research master plan; technical support for the 5 million hectare reforestation program; and capacity building, extension, research for agroforestry.</p> <p>WB: Northern mountains poverty reduction, community-based rural infrastructure, coastal wetlands conservation, forestry protection and rural development, Mekong water resources management, rural finance, agricultural diversification, agriculture research and extension.</p> <p>CIDA: Improved livelihoods for mountainous communities, proposed Tra Vinh Community College project.</p> <p>SIDA: Potential projects in MRDP and land administration reform.</p> <p>UNDP: Globalization, poverty, promoting an enabling business environment, sustainable financing for development.</p>
2. Education and Training		
2.1 Access to Education		<p>WB: Education for disadvantaged children, primary education, implementation of recommendations from the public expenditure review.</p> <p>CIDA: proposed Tra Vinh Community College, proposed education project.</p> <p>UNDP: Public service delivery and PAR, sustainable financing for development(see 1.1).</p>
2.2 Training and Retraining		<p>WB: potential for higher education project.</p> <p>CIDA: proposed Tra Vinh Community College.</p> <p>UNFPA: CP5, CP6, emphasis on training and retraining of</p>

POA2 Objectives and Activities	ADB Activities	Other Donors' Major Activities
		<p>women in all projects.</p> <p>UNDP: public service delivery and PAR.</p>
2.3 Reduce gender segregation in occupation-oriented training and curriculum material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upper Secondary Education Development (loan) • Second Lower Secondary Education Development 	WB: potential for various activities.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher Training • Capacity Building for Upper Secondary Education ^a • Education Sector Master Plan ^a 	
2.4 Education Management and Leadership		UNDP: Public Service Delivery and PAR (see 1.1).
3. Health		
3.1 Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population and Family Health • Rural Health • Provincial Town Water Supply and Sanitation • Second Provincial Towns Water Supply and Sanitation • Ho Chi Minh City Water Supply and Sanitation Rehabilitation • HIV/AIDS Community Prevention ^a • Human Capital of the Poor ^a 	<p>FAO-GCOP/VIE/021/AUL: Nutrition Improvement Project, Household Horticulture Development.</p> <p>WB: Family Health and Population.</p> <p>CIDA: Proposed HIV/AIDS project.</p> <p>SIDA: Ministry of Health gender workshops, integrating gender in many program activities.</p> <p>UNFPA: CP5 subprogram; CP6 reproductive health subprogram.</p>
3.2 Health Care and Family Planning Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provincial Town and Water (loan) • Second Provincial Town Water Supply (loan) • HCMC Water Supply and Sanitation (loan) • Rehabilitation Population and Family Health (loan) 	<p>FAO: Nutrition Improvement Project, Household Horticulture Development.</p> <p>WB: Potential for Healthcare for the Poor, implementation of recommendations from the public expenditure review, northern mountains poverty reduction, three cities sanitation, family health and population.</p>

POA2 Objectives and Activities	ADB Activities	Other Donors' Major Activities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural Health (loan) • Central and Southern Viet Nam Power Distribution (loan) • Human Capital of the Poor ^b 	<p>CIDA: (see 1.1) – Improved livelihoods for mountainous communities.</p> <p>UNFPA: CP5 subprogram; CP6 reproductive health subprogram.</p> <p>UNDP: Public service delivery and PAR, sustainable financing for development.</p>
3.3 Improve State Administration		<p>WB: Potential for Healthcare for the Poor.</p> <p>UNDP: Public service delivery and PAR, sustainable financing for development.</p>
4. Leadership and Decision Making		
4.1 Planning for Women Leaders and Managers		<p>SIDA: With GCOP, potential study on gender situation of personnel and organization departments, gender training and development of action plan for promoting women in the energy sector.</p> <p>UNDP: Public Service Delivery and PAR.</p>
4.2 Policies for Women's Cadres		UNDP: Public Service Delivery and PAR.
4.3 Human Resource Development, Personnel, and Public Administration		<p>SIDA: With GCOP, potential study on gender situation of personnel and organization departments, gender training and development of action plan for promoting women in the energy sector.</p> <p>UNDP: Public Service Delivery and PAR.</p> <p>RNE-UNDP: Capacity Building to Mainstream POA2.</p>
4.4 Training		RNE-UNDP: Capacity Building to Mainstream POA2.
4.5 Responsibility and Coordination of Activities		RNE-UNDP: Capacity Building to Mainstream POA2.
5. Rights		
5.1 Improving the Legal System	Technical assistance	CIDA: Proposed project on Legal Reform.

POA2 Objectives and Activities	ADB Activities	Other Donors' Major Activities
		<p>SIDA: Potential project on support to Ministry of Justice for law drafting and capacity building.</p> <p>UNDP: Rule of Law – Justice for All.</p> <p>RNE-UNDP: Capacity Building to Mainstream POA2.</p>
<p>5.2 Access to and Use of Legal Tools</p>	<p>Technical assistance</p>	<p>FAO: Gender equity in administration of the Land Law.</p> <p>CIDA: Proposed project on Legal Reform.</p> <p>SIDA: Potential project on Legal Education</p> <p>UNDP: Rule of Law – Justice for All.</p>
<p>5.3 Increase Capacity of Administration</p>	<p>Technical assistance</p>	<p>FAO: Gender equity in administration of the Land Law.</p> <p>CIDA: Proposed project on Legal Reform.</p> <p>SIDA: Potential project on Legal Education.</p> <p>UNDP: Rule of Law – Justice for All.</p>
<p>5.4 Equal Rights within Families</p>	<p>Technical assistance</p>	<p>CIDA: Proposed project on Legal Reform.</p> <p>UNDP: Rule of Law – Justice for All.</p>
<p>6. National Machinery</p>		
<p>6.1 Human Resource Development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MARD Technical assistance ^a • Enhancing Gender and Development Capacity in Developing Member Countries^b 	<p>UNDP: Public Service Delivery and PAR.</p> <p>RNE-UNDP: Capacity Building to Mainstream POA2.</p>
<p>6.2 Mainstreaming Policy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for development and implementation of gender strategy, and action plan for agriculture and rural development • Enhancing Gender and Development Capacity in Developing Member Countries^b 	<p>CIDA: Capacity Development and Enabling Environment for Rural Poverty Alleviation.</p> <p>CIDA: Proposed phase II project on Policy Implementation Assistance.</p> <p>SIDA: Potential project with the NA, Potential project on media gender training for journalists, culture and media support.</p>

POA2 Objectives and Activities	ADB Activities	Other Donors' Major Activities
		UNFPA: CP5 and CP6 UNDP: Public Service Delivery and PAR. RNE-UNDP: Capacity Building to Mainstream POA2.
6.3 Financial Mechanisms and Resources		UNDP: Public Service Delivery and PAR.
6.4 Research Capacity		FAO: Gender Dimension in Viet Nam's Transitional Agriculture and Rural Development for Policy and Program Planning. SIDA: Support to GSO to improve statistics. UNFPA: CP5 and CP6. UNFPA: Support to GSO on 1999 Census, Population Projections and Data Dissemination. UNDP: partnerships to fight poverty. RNE-UNDP: Capacity Building to Mainstream POA2.

Source: Adapted from the joint donor strategy matrix prepared by NCFW-UNDP Project 2001.

^a – Advisory Technical Assistance

^b – Regional Technical Assistance

Table A3.2: Gaps Identified in Donors' Support to POA2

POA2 Objectives and Activities	Gaps in Donor Projects
1. Employment and Economic Status	
1.1 Employment and Poverty Reduction	Vocational training for women, GCOP to develop policies and quotas for women workers, MOLISA to amend the labor law, mainstreaming gender in HEPR and labor export, research on women during economic transition.
1.2 Worker's Protection	Strengthen labor inspection for women workers, revise list of prohibited occupations, businesses to respect workers rights, survey on women in industrial zones, strengthen capacity of VLU, database on women workers
1.3 Vocational Training and Economic Resources	Mainstream gender in vocational training, establish job centers.
2. Education and Training	
2.1 Access to Education	.
2.2 Training and Retraining	Quotas for women's training, women's cadre training centers.
2.3 Reduce Gender segregation in Occupation-oriented Training and Curriculum Material	Mainstream gender and eliminate gender stereotypes in curriculum, give men privilege to study pedagogy.
2.4 Education Management and Leadership	Affirmative action and guidelines and training courses to promote women in management.
3. Health	
3.1 Awareness	
3.2 Health Care and Family Planning Services	
3.3 Improve State Administration	Surveys on occupational hazards, increase qualifications of women cadres in health sector.
4. Leadership and Decision Making	
4.1 Planning for Women Leaders and Managers	Plan for women leaders.

POA2 Objectives and Activities	Gaps in Donor Projects
4.2 Policies for Women's Cadres	Policies, women in leadership.
4.3 Human Resource Development, Personnel, and Public Administration	Increase proportion of professional women.
4.4 Training	Focus on remote and ethnic areas.
4.5 Responsibility and Coordination of Activities	Increase proportion of women in party committees, and other key government agencies.
5. Rights	
5.1 Improve Legal System	Review legal system in line with CEDAW, consultation with the national machinery on policy, guidelines on violence against women, monitor policies on women, encourage women to participate in social life.
5.2 Access to and Use of Legal Tools	Media to disseminate information about women's rights, provide information on acts of violation, train women cadres on use of legal system, increase women's legal literacy.
5.3 Increase Capacity of Administration	Laws on prostitution and trafficking, violence against women.
5.4 Equal Rights within Families	Movement to increase men's role in housework, prevent discrimination against women in the family.
6. National Machinery	
6.1 Human Resource Development	Restructure key positions in the national machinery, provide full-time qualified staff to each CFAW.
6.2 Mainstreaming Policy	Monitor laws related to women, right of CFAWs for policy advice, enhance role of VWU in state management.
6.3 Financial Mechanisms and Resources	Budget for women's activities, establish a center for the advancement of women.
6.4 Research Capacity	Integrate CEDAW into the legal system.

Source: NCF AW-UNDP Project 2001.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Desai 2001b, 56.
- 2 Ministry of Health 1999, cited in NCFAW 2001, 45.
- 3 Far Eastern Economic Review 29 June 2000.
- 4 UNAIDS 2001, 4.
- 5 Male farmers declined by 0.3% per annum and female farmers increased by 0.9% between 1993 and 1998.
- 6 Desai 2000, 20 and World Bank 1999.
- 7 National Committee for Advancement of Women (NCFAW) 2000; UNDP 2000.
- 8 UNDP 1998.
- 9 Although great efforts have been made to improve the reliability of data in Viet Nam, major problems remain. The data problems take many forms including the lack of reliability of data collected at local levels which is often compromised by local ambition to reach government targets; the transparency of statistics especially in sensitive areas such as basic education, literacy, health and income; the lack of representative data on ethnic minority communities because they are small, diverse and geographically inaccessible; the lack of data disaggregated by sex or ethnic minority especially at the provincial level.
- 10 ADB 1995.
- 11 Tran Thi Van Anh and Le Ngoc Hung 1997; Bui Thi Lan 1998.
- 12 Better gender analysis requires data disaggregated by sex within the households who suffer disadvantage. Disinterest in gender analysis in Viet Nam is often justified on the basis that individual rights within the household are subjugated to the well-being of the family resulting in undifferentiated households. However, available data indicate that this is not always the case and where family problems occur, women often suffer both physically and psychologically.
- 13 General Statistics Office [GSO] 2000.
- 14 GSO 2000.
- 15 NCFAW 2000, 40.
- 16 GSO 2000.
- 17 GSO 2000.
- 18 Li Tana 1996.
- 19 GSO 2000.
- 20 Do Thuy Binh 1995.
- 21 World Bank 2000, 81.
- 22 Information from the Committee for Ethnic Minorities and Mountainous Areas.
- 23 Desai 2001b, 56.
- 24 UNAIDS 2001, 4.
- 25 Ministry of Health 1999.
- 26 *Far Eastern Economic Review* 29 June 2000
- 27 Desai 2001b.
- 28 GSO 2000.
- 29 Desai 2000, iv.
- 30 The official definition of literacy in Viet Nam is: those aged between 15-35 years old who have completed 3 years of schooling (c.f. Table 1.1)
- 31 Desai 2000.
- 32 Desai 2000.
- 33 Monitoring Vietnamese and Mathematics 1998 – Phase 1 Report in Viet Nam Public Expenditure Review 2000, 57.
- 34 NCFAW 2000.
- 35 Fahey 1995.
- 36 In the Lao Cai Participatory Poverty Assessment, it is shown that among the Phu La, women cannot inherit land (Viet Nam Sweden Mountain Rural Development Programme 1999, 47).

37 Kelly and Le Bach Duong 1999.
38 Bond and Hayter 1998 cited in Kelly and Le Bach Duong 1999, 19.
39 Viet Nam-Sweden Mountain Rural Development Program 1999.
40 Center for Reproductive and Family Health and NZ Embassy 2001.
41 NCFAW 2000, 51.
42 GSO 2000.
43 Davidsen 2001, 6.
44 NCFAW 2000, 19.
45 ILO 1994.
46 Desai 2000, 27.
47 Rama 2001, 24.
48 During the Asian financial crisis of 1997–1999, the growth in unemployment for women was faster than for men as both state-owned enterprises and foreign-invested enterprises in the textile and garment industry reduced their labor force. However, as the sector recovered, the increase in employment was also rapid (Phan Thi Thanh 2001, 59).
49 Tran Thi Van Anh and Le Ngoc Hung 1997.
50 A survey by the Research Center for Female Labor of 502 industrial enterprises found that female labor in the nonstate sector is very high: 67.9% in private enterprises, 63.5% in foreign-invested enterprises, and 63.6% in limited companies. A survey in Tan Thuan Export Processing Zone (EPZ) also showed that women accounted for 67.7% of workers (Phan Thi Thanh 2001, 53-54). Another survey of 9 enterprises in the EPZ found that 85.8% were female (Phan Thi Thanh 2001, 55).
51 Desai 2000, Table 4.29.
52 World Bank 2000, 86.
53 Desai 2000 and World Bank 1999.
54 Desai 2001b, 42.
55 Desai 2001b, Figures 4.16 and 4.17.
56 Bales 2000. According to the VLSS98, of those who worked in cultivation in the past 12 months, 52% were women (Desai 2000, Table 4.15). Furthermore, 71% of female labor was involved in cultivation compared to 68% of male labor. See also NCFAW 2000.
57 Bales 2000.
58 Desai 2000.
59 Le Thi Nham Tuyet 1996, cited in NCFAW 2000.
60 Desai 2001b, 33.
61 Viet Nam-Sweden Mountain Rural Development Program 1999.
62 Desai 2000, Table 4.8.
63 Desai 2001b, 34.
64 Bhushan et al. 2000.
65 Desai 2001b, Table 3.20.
66 UNDP 1996, 26.
67 International research shows that the position of women in terms of status and decision-making role within the family improves with access to credit (World Bank 2000). However, further research is needed in Viet Nam before any conclusions can be drawn.
68 World Bank 2000, iv.
69 Desai 2000.
70 Government-Donor-NGO Poverty Working Group 1999, 33.
71 World Bank 2000, 7.
72 Tran Thi Van Anh and Le Ngoc Hung 1997, 91.
73 Viet Nam Sweden Mountain Rural Development Programme 1999.
74 UNDP 2000.
75 NCFAW 2000, 53.
76 NCFAW 2000.

77 The ADB has an approved technical assistance to assist the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural
78 Development with capacity building to enable them to deliver this mandate.
79 NCFAW 2000.
80 Bhushan et al. 2000; Desai 2000.
81 A more detailed list can be found in Table A3.1.
82 R179-99: *Fighting Poverty in Asia and the Pacific: The Poverty Reduction Strategy of the Asian*
83 *Development Bank* 19 October 1999, p.12.
84 Sec. M17-01: *Long Term Strategic Framework of the Asian Development Bank (2001–2015)* 21
85 February 2001, p.2. Manila.
86 Women's practical needs can include access to decent health care, education, potable water and labor-
87 saving technologies, while their strategic needs may include formal ownership of land, access to
88 financial services, participation in community associations, or access to justice. Practical and strategic
89 needs are closely related, and some needs have both practical and strategic aspects. Both are relevant to
90 achieving the goal of gender equality. ADB Policy on GAD, 16.
91 In the tradition of WID, the strategy emphasized increased women's participation with only some
92 mention of empowerment, which has more resonance with a GAD approach. However, it should be
93 noted that the 1995 gender strategy for Viet Nam was progressive and not constrained by the WID
94 policy of ADB of the time.
95 VIE: CBP;1995, 54-64.
96 To date, progress on lending has been very slow in Viet Nam. Only three loan projects have been
97 completed but more than 100 technical assistance projects have been completed. Of 27 loans, 6 are
98 approaching completion 18 are midterm, and 3 are in the approval process.
99 ADB 1999.
100 World Bank 2000.
101 ADB 2001a.
102 World Bank 2000.
103 This bibliography includes pertinent references not directly cited in the text. In addition to the
104 references listed here, a number of ADB documents were consulted, including the Report and
105 Recommendation of the President for most loans and technical assistance grants, midterm reviews, and
106 correspondence held on file in ADB's Hanoi Office.