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Employment and Life of Vietnamese Women

During Economic Transition





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EMPLOYMENT AND LIFE
OF VIETNAMESE WOMEN
DURING ECONOMIC TRANSITION

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FOREWORD

Over the past century, Vietnamese women together with the whole Vietnamese nation, have recorded great achievements of historic significance. Side by side with their husbands, children and brothers, they carried out a heroic struggle for the total liberation of Vietnam from foreign invasions and its reunification, which has brought it into a new era of building an independent, prosperous and socialist-oriented nation.

Vietnamese women have achieved progress during their participation in the common revolutionary cause of the nation. Their movement has developed both in depth and in breadth; their role and position have been obviously raised.

The Vietnamese woman is becoming more and more the genuine master of society, enjoying a significant political status and the right to equality, having a higher educational standard and fulfilling the duties of a citizen in a free and democratic society.

Many noble moral and spiritual values of the Vietnamese woman have been exposed in the fight against foreign aggressors. Nowadays, in the time of peace and national building, many of her fine qualities, including the intellect and creative thinking, are demonstrated in labour and the effort to better the life of her own family, her native land and her compatriots.

Women in fact are an essentially important resource for development of the Vietnamese nation at all times.

The Vietnamese woman has actively taken part in the common struggle of the nation, has contributed to its victories and successes, enjoying properly her legitimate rights and other honours. At the same time, she also shares the responsibility for the temporary failures and difficulties during the process of national construction and bears the consequences therefrom. Thus, during the period of building socialism following the model of State subsidies (1960-1980), the Vietnamese people experienced many privations and hardships generating from the system of ration ticket distribution and the egalitarianism in work as well as in the enjoyment of material and spiritual welfare. Vietnamese women then, mothers of many children, had to ensure food and clothing for the whole family, bearing the heavy burden of work and various anxieties of livelihood.

Facing the difficulties and deadlock in the development of the national economy and the management of society under the State subsidy mechanism, the Vietnamese Communist Party and the State have since 1986 implemented the *policy of Renovation (doi moi)*. A series of radically changed socio-economic policies have been carried out, warmly welcomed and supported by the masses. They have created many favorable conditions for different social strata to generate jobs, increase their incomes and improve their living standard.

In this period of economic transition, the life of the Vietnamese woman is strongly affected by the changes in all aspects: employment, working and living conditions, the enjoyment of material and spiritual welfare benefits, etc.

There have been many positive factors and advances. However, new problems have arisen, together with new difficulties and obstacles that need to be urgently overcome.

The Party and State underline that *humans constitute both the target and motive force of the country's development* in general, especially in the process of national industrialization and modernization in the 21st century. This cause is for the Vietnamese people, and its motive force is also the

latter's strength, including women, who are an extremely important fundamental force. Therefore, it is useful to analyze the actual state of Vietnamese women's employment in the present period of transition, and the emerging problems that require proper solutions.

Over recent years, besides the viewpoints of the Party, State and President Hồ Chí Minh on the path leading women to equality, freedom and development, a new standpoint of methodological nature has come into being. This is the *gender approach* in the study of problems related to women and men, to gender equality, employment and other fields. It has already been applied by many branches and individuals, including scientific workers, cadres of the women's movement, policy-makers of the Vietnamese Government, officials of national and international organizations involved in the activities relevant to women, gender and development in Vietnam.

In this book, basing ourselves on the official standpoint on the path to women's emancipation and gender equality, in combination with the gender approach, we try to analyze the employment and life of the Vietnamese women in the context of the market mechanism, the impact of the socio-economic changes recorded over the past ten years. With the data and documents collected mostly from 1987 to 1997, we attempt to outline a general picture of the actual state of employment of women of different backgrounds: workers, peasants, intellectuals, as well as their enthusiasm in the period of Renovation, and the difficulties they are facing in life.

Proceeding from this situation, we propose a number of solutions to further empowering women, to raising the living standard of their own and their families, to building gender equality in the context of Renovation, when the country is embarking on the 21st century.

The book has the following three chapters:

Chapter I: Vietnamese Women as a resource for the development of society; approaches to the problem.

Chapter II: Employment and Life of women in the course of development of the market mechanism and national industrialization and modernization.

Chapter III: Women making efforts to advance and to achieve Mastership over Society, and gender responsive policies.

In this book readers will find some latest data taken from the 1999 housing and population census results made known in early 2001 by the General Department of Statistics.

It is hoped that this book will provide readers with a number of helpful information and documents concerning gender and employment in Vietnam and some proposals for the way to develop women's resources in the cause of national construction. The author sincerely thanks SIDA (Sweden) and the Swedish Embassy in Vietnam and Thế Giới Publishers for their assistance in the publication of the English version of this book.

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Prof. Lê Thi

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CHAPTER I

VIETNAMESE WOMEN AS A RESOURCE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIETY; APPROACHES TO THE PROBLEM

I. VIETNAMESE WOMEN AS A FACTOR AND RESOURCE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUR COUNTRY OVER THE COURSE OF HISTORY

Human beings constitute the factor of development of society. This idea runs through many resolutions of the Vietnamese Communist Party and policies and laws of the Vietnamese State. It is clearly stated in a Party document: "To achieve the strategic objectives laid down by the 8th Congress of the Party, it is necessary to discover and utilize many different resources; among them *human resources* are the most precious and play a decisive role, especially in the case of Vietnam whose financial and material resources are still limited."¹

Humans are at the same time the *motive force* and *target* for development. The strength of the whole population, of human resources, especially of great talent, which generates from the ability and intellect of the whole nation, is the fundamental motive force and resource for pushing up the development of the Vietnamese society, from a low to a higher level.

1. Document of the Second Plenum of the Central Committee of the Vietnamese Communist Party (8th tenure). National Political Publishing House, p. 9.

Today, this strength is devoted concentratedly to the cause of national industrialization and modernization to take Vietnam from the agricultural civilization to the industrial and post-industrial civilization.

The *objectives* of that development are economic growth, well-being for each individual and each family, improvement of the quality of life and enjoyment of cultural, educational, medical welfare for each individual and each family.

Vietnamese women constitute a fundamental work force, an important factor for development of society. At the same time, they have the direct responsibility in reproducing human beings, or the essential manpower for the country.

Vietnamese women have the right to enjoyment of the benefits brought forth by the country's development.

1. Vietnamese women and their contributions to national civilization

Through more than 4,000 years of history, the Vietnamese people have scored glorious achievements in the building and defence of their country. Vietnamese women in fact represent an essential factor in the building of the nation's civilization. Over the centuries the Vietnamese people have worked hard to maintain their life, develop the country and enhance a culture imbued with distinct national identity.

The natural environment of Vietnam presents plenty of both potential for development and great difficulties (floods, storms, droughts). In addition, the country has experienced frequent wars waged by foreign aggressors. In such conditions, the labour force of Vietnam has to face a hard fight. On the background of the common picture of the tough and courageous life of the Vietnamese people stands out the image of the Vietnamese woman representing the diligence, perseverance, and heroism of the whole nation.

Vietnam is an agricultural country of wet rice growers in Southeast Asia. The labour of women, therefore, is always linked with the *wet rice field*, with rudimentary methods of cultivation, in a self-sufficient economy. Most rural women are never separated from agricultural production and do not only stay home to take care of their children and household chores. Since the ancient time, the Vietnamese woman has taken charge of many stages in agricultural production: sowing and transplanting rice, weeding, fertilizing and irrigating the field, harvesting, etc. Nearly 100% of the rice transplanting work is done by women. Only in recent years have we seen here and there some men on the fields learning to transplant rice. In their turn, women now are also engaged in ploughing and harrowing the fields like men. These phenomena may be explained by the fact that many men, particularly husbands, have left their villages to go to earn their living in cities. Therefore, their wives must take up all the links of the chain of agricultural production.

In general, the methods of farming are still rudimentary. Vietnamese women's work on the rice field is chiefly manual, with simple instruments: the hoe, the sickle, the pair of bamboo baskets and the shoulder pole. This is the common image of the rural Vietnamese woman. Her hard manual simple work brings about only limited results, and she can hardly earn enough money to ensure the life of her family.

With the increase of goods exchange in recent years, more and more women-besides agricultural production- are engaged in *handicraft and small industry* to raise their incomes. Working in the evening, or when they are not busy with farm work, they can skillfully make conical hats, brooms, baskets, combs, etc. Many common consumer goods are now sold at low prices in the countryside's markets. They are products of traditional crafts linked with a number of families, villages and communes. Among them some articles with a high aesthetic value are found. In recent years, many trades linked with agricultural production have been developed in which a great number of women participate in, for instance, making mats or woolen carpets, embroidery, food processing, production

of cakes, noodles, dried litchi and longan, menthol oil and so on. At present, in rural areas, the percentage of households specialized in handicraft and small industry is still low (from 6% to 10%). Meanwhile, there is a high percentage of households engaged at the same time in agriculture and handicraft or small industry.

The low level of development of the commodity economy is manifested in the *way of life* and in *household maintenance activities* of women.

Services for helping families are developing only in urban areas. In the countryside, especially in mountainous and remote areas, women have to take care of all the household domestic chores: they must husk and pound rice, cook meals for the family, prepare food for pigs and chickens, (according to sociological surveys, until 1998 from 80 to 90% of housework are done by women). In mountainous areas, many women still grow by themselves cotton plants and flax, spin thread, weave cloth, and make clothes for all members of the family. The burden of work weighs heavily on them.

Over recent years, mainly in the Red River and Mekong River Deltas, positive changes have been noticed thanks to the development of a commodity economy, the increase of consumer goods exchange through the market, and social services, which help women and their families in daily life.

The contingent of female workers, who are slender and of small stature, create great material values, ensuring not only the life of their families, but contributing also to the support for the people's army.

During the numerous resistance wars of the Vietnamese people against foreign aggressors, women replaced their husbands, sons and brothers in taking up *production, family affairs, and community management*. When men were busy on the battlefield, women stayed home to care for maintenance of the family, take care of children, old parents and provision of supplies for the army. The traditional diligence of Vietnamese women has

been brought into full play during the recent 30 years of armed struggle against French and American invaders.

Traditionally, Vietnamese women are *heroic and indomitable in the fight against foreign aggression*. The first popular uprising led by the two Trung sisters marked the beginning of the Vietnamese glorious tradition: "When the Motherland is invaded, even women should stand up to beat the aggressors." Since this insurrection, women have always participated in the uprisings and revolutionary struggles for national independence and reunification, proving to be very steadfast, conscientious, brave, clever and skilful, undertaking diversified activities. Heroic and indomitable in the combat against foreign aggressors, Vietnamese women also *struggle resolutely against oppression, exploitation, and any discrimination*.

In the family, the Vietnamese woman always makes efforts to fulfil her responsibilities as mother and wife. Facing difficulties and privations, especially in rural areas, most women manage to ensure food and clothing for their families so that their children can grow healthy and go to school. Besides, women try to meet other needs of the family: weddings, funerals, celebration of anniversaries, contributions to the family clan, to the village and community.

With their natural function of *giving birth to children* and caring for small babies in order to perpetuate the human race, women have to overcome lots of difficulties and hardships. At the same time, they find joy and happiness in fulfilling their noble function.

It is women that *maintain and hand down the fine cultural values of the nation* from generation to generation. Many fine qualities and morals of the Vietnamese nation have been preserved to date such as faithfulness and love of spouses, filial piety and gratitude to one's parents, respect for the elderly, mutual assistance between relatives, friends, co-villagers, etc. Here we should note the great contribution of women as teachers for their children in the family. Women also play an important role in building and strengthening the fine relations between humans, helping to preserve for

the Vietnamese society a proper pattern of life, ensuring sympathy, affection, mutual help between community members, especially in case of misfortune and difficulties.

In fact, Vietnamese women constitute a motive force for the development of the Vietnamese society, a factor pushing up the progress of the Vietnamese people in the building of material bases as well as cultural and spiritual life.

2. Vietnamese women in the current Renovation of the country

Since 1975, the reunified Vietnamese nation has entered the stage of building socialism in peace. However, many changes have occurred in the national and international situations. Vietnamese women, together with the whole nation, try their best to overcome the aftermaths of war, to restore and develop the economy, culture and the country.

However, due to consequences of the State-subsidy mechanism in economic management that lasted 20 years (from 1960's to 1980's) coupled with other shortcomings, the production activities of the population encountered many obstacles; their living standards were raised inconsiderably. Women, as mothers and wives, faced countless difficulties and hardships in sustaining their families, especially their children. Since 1986, Vietnam has been experiencing an all-round renovation.

The economy has shifted from the State-subsidy centrally-planned and bureaucratic mechanism to a *market multi-sectoral economic mechanism* with different forms of ownership: State, collective, individual, private and others. In rural areas, land is allotted to farmers on a long-term contractual basis. This helps to push up the development of the household economy. People are allowed to do business in many different trades and branches, especially private services. The State carries out the policy to encourage foreign investments in the Renovation of technologies and techniques in order to industrialize and modernize the entire country.

In the *socio-political field*, democracy is being promoted in different aspects, and efforts are being made to build a law-governed state. At the same time, State subsidies for health care, culture and education are being reduced. And the State encourages the development of private services in these fields. Regarding *international relations*, as the open-door policy is implemented, exchanges with foreign countries in various fields, tend to be increasing. Foreign investment in Vietnam is encouraged and economic, cultural, scientific, and technical cooperation between Vietnam and many other countries is being promoted.

Under the impact of the new socio-economic policies, enthusiastically supported by the Vietnamese people, many changes have occurred which, in their turn, affect deeply the life of women and their families. The encouragement to the boost of many different economic sectors and goods exchange helps the population *create themselves many jobs*, increase their incomes, stabilize the livelihood of their families and improve their living conditions. We can say that to the first achievements of *Renovation*, women have made great contributions given the fact that they account for 52% of the social workforce and 55% of the workforce directly engaged in industry, agriculture and commerce (Statistics of 1998).

Dictated by the needs of daily life, many women, who are already "untied", become dynamic and bold in developing business, and learning new trades or crafts to enhance the living standards of their families. In this "boom" of diversified economic sectors (including individual, private, and collective sectors) we can note the great efforts, intellect, and creativity of Vietnamese women, which are exposed especially in the household economy. The long-term allotment of land for production to peasant households has pushed up investments in *intensive farming*, helping to increase the productivity of cultivation and animal husbandry.

Meanwhile, this also allows families to transfer the redundant workforce and time to *non-agricultural occupations*. The thriving of the household economy in both urban and rural areas has created lots of material wealth, food and diversified the range of consumer goods, and generated many new jobs.

Women account for a very high percentage in the total workforce in various services. In commerce and hotel services, the percentage of female workers is 78% (in 1993).

With the introduction of advanced techniques and technologies, the establishment of series of private enterprises and joint ventures with Vietnamese and foreign investments, the *contingent of female workers* has increased considerably. Many of them have attained high levels of skill and can operate modern machines. Women form the majority of workers in the industries producing textiles, garments, leather articles, food and food-stuffs processing, etc. Their products are sold inside Vietnam and exported to other countries. Female workers have contributed significantly to the country's economic growth over the past 10 years.

The process of Renovation in business management and development of enterprises, (including private ones), has revealed many examples of *good female directors of enterprises*, with a high management level, who run their business very efficiently and who are widely acknowledged by public opinion. Until 1996, the women who headed small- and medium-sized enterprises accounted for 25% of the total number of entrepreneurs in urban areas, and 22% in rural areas.

The development of cultural relations entails the increase of books, newspapers and other sources of information.

Many *female scientific workers, technicians, intellectuals, writers and artists* bring into play their talent initiatives and creativity, bringing forth valued inventions and outstanding works and thus contributing actively to the Renovation of the county.

Great changes are taking place in Vietnam, at this moment when humankind is entering the 21st century. Vietnamese people are moving *from the agricultural civilization to the industrial and post-industrial civilization*.

In this process, women themselves are involved in the Renovation and should renovate themselves. They should not only work diligently, but

should become more dynamic, bolder, and promote to the utmost their capabilities, creative mind and intelligence. They should have a new mode of thinking and action, be engaged in new enterprises in the interest of their families and of the whole society.

With their creative labour, intelligence, good moral qualities and fine sentiments, Vietnamese women have contributed considerably to the building of national civilization. However due to objective and subjective causes, the role and position of Vietnamese women have been still limited so far.

Noteworthy is discrimination against women, a fact that has existed for thousands of years. It is still bringing about obstacles for the development of talent of women, limiting their contributions to society and to the happiness of their families.

The image of the *woman representing the level of civilization of the nation* is seen in both aspects: positive and negative, progressive and backward, good and bad, successful and unsuccessful. The life of women is deeply influenced by the socio-political regime, and the economic and cultural development of the country in each specific historical period, and is also linked with various levels of civilization of humankind.

As the French sociologist Charles Fourier said, "The level of women's emancipation is the measure of the level of humankind's civilization."

To *eradicate all forms of discrimination against women* and to practise gender equality in all fields is a long struggle not separated from the advances of the country. This struggle is not only for the interests of women, but also for the common interests of the nation and of both sexes.

This is the liberation of a strong workforce, a fundamental factor for *the building of national civilization*. This is the burning desire of Vietnamese women in the cause of national Renovation at present.

At the same time, this is the lofty objective which our Party, State and people are striving to achieve.

The elimination of discrimination against women requires good coordination of activities in different fields, from practical activities of the broad masses and various mass organizations, to the measures of administration, of policy making and implementing organs, as well as the results of researches carried out by scientific and cultural workers, theoreticians, and ideologists.

To make women the object of study of many scientific branches and to develop the discipline "Women studies" as well as "Science on Gender" are now an important task set for theoreticians and researchers who are engaged in the study of strategies concerning women and gender equality.

II. STUDIES ON VIETNAMESE WOMEN. VIEWPOINTS ON AND APPROACHES TO THE PROBLEM OF GENDER EQUALITY, ESPECIALLY IN WORK AND ENJOYMENT OF WELFARE

Studies on women and gender equality as a discipline in Vietnam have developed from a low to a higher level, step by step perfected.

If the first studies were concentrated only on *practical problems and women's movements*, recent research works already combine practical problems with *theories*, paying more attention to fundamental theories, and shifting from women studies to *science on gender*.

In this book, we only mention some landmarks of that process. And proceeding mainly from the angle of women studies, we will analyse the situation of women and gender equality in the current period.

1. Viewpoints of the Vietnamese Communist Party and State on gender equality

To bring equality, freedom, well-being and happiness to women and their children is a persistent objective of the Vietnamese Revolution and an important national strategy at present time.



A lesson on shapes game at a nursery in Hoàn Kiếm District, Hanoi.
Photo: Bích Ngọc, Vietnam News Agency

When it was born, the Vietnamese Communist Party stated clearly in its *Political Program and Appeal to the Vietnamese People* that the practice of gender equality would be one objective of the Vietnamese Communist Party.

After the victorious August 1945 Revolution, in October 1946 the first Constitution was officially promulgated, recognizing that women are equal with men in all fields.

President Hồ Chí Minh solemnly declared at the time: "The Vietnamese people have all rights to freedom. The Vietnamese *Constitution* declares to the world: Vietnamese women are on an equal footing with men to enjoy all citizens' rights to freedom."¹

The current *Constitution* of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam promulgated in 1992 underlines in more detail gender equality in Article 63: "Female and male citizens have the same rights in all fields: political, economic, cultural, social fields, and in the family. All acts of discrimination against women and violation on women's dignity are forbidden."

Article 64 states: "The State shall protect marriage and the family. Marriage shall follow the principles of free consent, progressiveness, monogamy, and equality between spouses..."

1.1. According to the standpoints of the Vietnamese Communist Party and State, the *elimination of discrimination against women* should be achieved in different fields: production and social activities, marriage and family, individual life, intellectual, psychological and sentimental fields. The problem is not only to bring immediate material interests to women, but also to create for them a bright future for sustainable development and necessary conditions to bring into full play their capabilities, strength, intellect, personality, and to unceasingly raise the extent of their enjoyment of material, cultural and spiritual benefits.

1. Võ Nguyên Giáp, *The Historical Stages*. Literature Publishing House, 1977, p. 373.

So, gender equality is a great social problem requiring the attention of everybody. This is not the solution of disputes between the two sexes and is not an affair concerning only women.

Gender equality should be *linked with national development* (it is not equality in poverty and backwardness). The progress, civilization and well-being of Vietnamese society are fundamental prerequisites for genuine liberation of women and realization of women's rights to equality and freedom in all fields.

This truth is being demonstrated in the society of Vietnam. The country is now in the process of Renovation, the people's living standards are being improved. Progress has been achieved in the life of women and their children. At the same time, the difficulties of this period of transition to the market economy, the backwardness of production processes especially in agriculture, the lack of capital and technological knowledge and social evils that tend to be developing have a bad effect on working women and their families, limiting the implementation of gender equality.

The solutions to women's problems depend on many great social problems of the country that are very complicated.

Firstly, it is necessary that the economy should make great progress, with the development of many different occupations and branches, and the application of scientific and technological advances to production.

In pair with the re-distribution of tasks and re-arrangement of labour force in the whole society, it is necessary to have women take part together with men in many different occupations, trades and branches (not to concentrate women only in traditional occupations such as agriculture and forestry, like at present). The reduction of tiring stages of work, and the increase of productivity will help to improve the working and living conditions of women.

At the same time opportunities should be created for women to have jobs suitable for their health and reproductive function. The development

of State and private social services to help families will contribute to alleviating the burden of housework for women, allowing them to have more time for rest, and study to raise their educational standards in all fields. Women then will be able to acquire new knowledge, improve their expertise, and assume the same responsibilities as men.

The *progress in laws* should be expressed in the institutionalization, in a clear and more concrete way, of women's rights and duties, with the establishment of organs that would have effective measures to ensure the strict observation of laws and regulations already promulgated by the State.

Cultural and ideological progress aims to eliminate spiritual and social obstacles to the implementation of gender equality, to the development of populations' abilities, talent, intelligence and aspirations for freedom of women.

The development of education and culture will help women to raise their cultural standard, to enjoy valued literary and artistic products, creating conditions for the shaping of women's independent and creative personality.

1.2. We should underline the *role of the State* in the implementation of gender equality, in the increase of democratic rights for women in the family and in society.

Vietnam has passed through long periods of feudal and colonialist rule in which all freedoms of citizens were prohibited. Therefore, the implementation of *democratic rights for each individual* is a new thing, which is very difficult to realize and often prevented by those who are authoritarian, despotic and who want to maintain their privileges and special advantages. At the same time, backward patriarchal customs and habits still remain, limiting the freedoms of each individual. Respect for men and despising women still dominate the thinking of many people. Therefore, violations of women's rights often take place in the family and in society. In many cases, the consequences are grave, but public opinion does not pay attention to them. Hence, the State should have effective measures to ensure women's

rights. The revolutionary administration should be an important tool in the struggle for women's emancipation and gender equality.

This is also a reason why we should have women take part in the National Assembly, the administration at different echelons, the leading organs of different services at central and local levels. We should implement the rights of women to equality with men in the management of society. Many resolutions of the Vietnamese Communist Party and policies of the Vietnamese State underline the necessity to evaluate properly the expertise and abilities of women cadres to pay due attention to the formation, training and entrusting women with management and leading posts and to fight against feudalist insular thinking in the utilization and promotion of women cadres.

1.3. President Hồ Chí Minh once said, "Respecting men and despising women is a habit that has thousands of years of history; it is embedded in the mind of everybody, of all families and all social strata. It has become a socio-psychological problem."

Therefore, *the struggle to eliminate discrimination against women is a long and difficult ideological struggle* aiming to eradicate backward conservative ideas that persist in our society.

According to the teaching of President Hồ Chí Minh, this struggle cannot be led to victory through the use of force. It is necessary, through a cultural and ideological revolution, to carry out education, criticism and persuasion among the masses in order to eradicate backward ideas and to build a progressive mode of thinking for both sexes, for people of all age-groups, with due attention to be paid to men and the elderly.

To do away the habit of respecting men and despising women is in fact to *liberate women from their inferiority complex* making them timid, hesitating, lacking confidence in their own capabilities and afraid to fight for their own interests. In the struggle to eliminate discrimination against women and achieve gender equality, women themselves cannot depend on other people and have a wait-and-see attitude.

On the contrary, *women themselves should strive to make progress and liberate themselves*. Relying on their own strength and in an independent way, women should struggle to gain and defend their rights and interests.

To achieve gender equality is the target set by Vietnamese women for themselves. In striving for this target, *the basic force is firstly women themselves*. Realities of the past 60 years prove that when women are awakened they will never remain passive or inactive; instead, they will dare to think, to say and to do, bringing into play their creativity and talent to contribute to the development of the country. Women's revolutionary consciousness, and awareness of the fact that they are regarded dependent and inferior are basic factors to stir women to stand up in the struggle for the right to be masters of themselves and of society.

Here, *the role of culture and science* has a very great significance. In the past, most Vietnamese women were illiterate. Due to the anti-illiteracy campaign carried out continuously during many years, much progress has been achieved. However, until 1993, the percentage of illiterate women still accounted for 17.7% of the total number of Vietnamese women aged 10 upward¹ (the percentage of illiterate men was 8.6%).

In general, the majority of women still have now a low educational level. Only the all-round development of education and culture will in fact liberate the intellect and talents of women, allowing them to have greater contributions to the country and the world.

The Resolutions of the 2nd Plenum of the Vietnamese Communist Party's Central Committee on Education and Training, and of the 5th Plenum of the Party Central Committee (8th term) on Culture, are opening bright prospects for the development of Vietnamese women. Acquiring knowledge of science and culture is the master-key for women to open a new way to a beautiful future, under the light of science and technology of the 21st century.

1. *Data on Vietnamese Women 1985-1994*. Statistical Publishing House, 1995.

1.4. President Hồ Chí Minh pointed out, "The force of the revolution to liberate women is the progress of our country on the economic, political, legal, cultural, and ideological fields."

The development of women is not separated from the *progress of Vietnamese society* on the path of building a well-being, progressive and happy life. The meeting of women's needs cannot surpass the socio-economic capacities of the country. The cultural standard and living conditions of women reflect the current level of civilization of the Vietnamese nation who is entering the 21st century, shifting from the agricultural civilization to the industrial and post-industrial civilization. Vietnam is still making the first steps on this path, facing lots of difficulties and obstacles on different fields.

A great number of working women, especially peasants and mountainous or ethnic minority women are the most disadvantaged. Their difficulties and hardships reflect in part the backwardness of the country and the troubles arising in this period of transition to a market mechanism. The whole Vietnamese people, together with those women, should strive to overcome those privations to implement gender equality in all fields, to bring about well-being, progress, happiness for themselves and their children.

Reviewing the standpoints of the Vietnamese Communist Party and President Hồ Chí Minh, as well as the laws and policies of the Vietnamese State, we can see the consistency in thinking, from the foundation of the Party and the State until now, which is demonstrated both in the process of national construction and in the endeavor to lead women to freedom, equality and development linked with the socio-economic development of the country. The strategy for stabilization and development of the Vietnamese economy up to the year 2000 has underlined that economic growth should be linked with social progress, justice, cultural development and environmental protection.¹

1. Documents of the 7th Congress of the Party. Truth Publishing House, p. 9.

The Resolutions of the 8th Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party once again emphasize the mapping out and implementation of the Development Strategy for the Advancement of Vietnamese Women towards the year 2000, with special attention to be paid to skill training and job creation, to help women develop the household economy, and improve their living conditions, and to care for the health of women themselves and children¹.

2. The formation of women studies as a discipline and science on gender. Standpoints on, approaches to and methods of study on gender equality in Vietnam

2.1. Women studies, a scientific branch newly shaped in Vietnam

In Vietnam the work of mobilizing women has been carried out for a long time. Especially, the foundation of the Vietnamese Communist Party in 1930 marked a new development of this work, with cadres specifically in charge of mobilizing women. However only since the 1980s, women and social relations concerning them have become objects of study of a scientific branch.

The study on women and gender equality in Vietnam is touched upon by a number of authors of modern time, who approach it chiefly from the angles of literature (especially poetry), art and history. The Vietnamese Constitution in 1945 promulgated the equal rights of women and men. During 30 years of the anti-French resistance war, due to the requirements of the revolutionary mobilization and the development of women's movement, many articles and reports of various mass organizations, especially the Vietnam Women's Union and the Women's Committee of the Vietnamese Confederation of Labour, exposed realities in the life of different strata of women. They analysed the imbalance in the relations between contributions

1. Documents of the 8th Congress of the Party. National Political Publishing House, 1996, p.125.

and interests of women, underlining the low position of women in the family and in society as consequences of discrimination against women. Those articles and reports, though simple on the theoretical plane, reflected the realities of the daily life of Vietnamese women.

Later, due to the necessity of this work, in the 1980's, a department of women studies was step by step established at the Office of the Vietnam Women's Union Central Executive Committee. However, this department concentrates its efforts on the study of draft policies and proposals to the Party and State on women-related problems. Therefore, due attention was not paid to fundamental studies and theoretical standpoints.

In the same period, the Resolution 176a of the Council of Ministers in January 1985, entrusted the Vietnamese Committee for Social Sciences (now the National Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities) with the responsibility to lay down, in coordination with related organs, a research programme on women's problems, in order to provide a scientific basis for the promulgation of laws and policies concerning women.

Following this direction, the Committee for Social Sciences assigned a group of female cadres with the task of carrying out the first 3-year research programme on Women-Employment-Family (1985-1987). Considering the result of this programme, the Committee for Social Sciences decided in March 1987 to establish the *Research Centre on Women*, an institution specialized in women studies. It has the task of coordinating the related organs to organize research programmes on a number of subjects, training cadres for the research on women's problems, disseminating knowledge of women, family and gender equality.

Between 1985 and 1995, a series of researches and scientific seminars was conducted with the following subjects: women - employment - family and gender equality. The woman since long depicted only from the angle of literature, especially poetry, art or history (many authors are men), had become the *object of study of many branches of social and natural sciences*. Women studies becomes more and more an inter-disciplinary branch of study.

What is then the branch of *women studies*? It can be defined as a field of study on women, basing itself on observations and surveys of the real life of women, together with related social relations, in work, employment, family life, social activities, enjoyment of material and cultural benefits, power and position, etc. From the results of research, the discipline aims to provide theoretical and practical bases for the work of mobilizing women, suggesting orientations for activity and measures to implement gender equality, to achieve progress and development for Vietnamese women.

The woman is an object of study of many different scientific branches: ethnology, sociology, jurisprudence, ethnography, psychology, economics, biology and historical sciences. Therefore, women studies is a branch gathering the research results of natural sciences, social sciences and humanities.

The *comprehensive interbranch study* is a decisive factor for the success of women studies. It is regrettable that until now, this has not been well-done. It is necessary also to ensure a close co-operation between scientific workers and managers, activists of women's movements, policy-makers, and cadres in charge of implementing the policies and programmes related to women.

2.2. *Main standpoints, approaches and methods of women studies*

Researches on theories, viewpoints and methodology are fundamental researches of women studies. However, until now, due attention has not been paid to those researches. Most research works tend to be descriptions of realities, and actual situations, without laying down general theoretical remarks to provide guidance for further researches.

The main standpoints, approaches and methods of women studies are as follows:

a. Fundamental theoretical standpoints of Marxism-Leninism

Marxism-Leninism bases the study on the formation of inequality between men and women on the development of economic factors,

humankind's civilization, the developments and changes of the family, of the social distribution of labour, the birth of the private ownership regime and of different social classes.

According to K. Marx and F. Engels, the path to emancipation of women and gender equality is closely linked with social revolutions, with the economic, political, cultural, ideological developments of the contemporary society.

b. The development standpoint

The development standpoint situates the problem of women studies in the context of human civilization's development. Starting from the primitive communist regime, without gender discrimination and with matriarchy being predominant, human society moved to the patriarchal regime dominated by patriarchal ideology with obvious discrimination against women, polygamy, imposed marriages and distribution of labour by gender, which were all present in the feudal regime with agricultural civilization.

The development of economy and culture linked with industrial civilization, and intensified industrialization and urbanization changed the role and status of women.

In comparison with the past, they have more independence in the economy, marriage and the family. At the same time, the establishment of the law-governed capitalist State brought about the recognition of human rights, including women's rights, to freedom, equality and democracy.

At present, the advance of scientific, technical and technological revolutions in the post-industrial, informatics civilization, is affecting the life of women. The achievements of modern medicine enable women to be free and conscious in their reproductive function (the satisfaction of sexual desire is separated from giving birth to children). The improvement of cultural standard goes in pair with the alleviation of the burden of housework, thanks to the development of social welfare, health care,

cultural and social services. There are more favorable conditions for achieving gender equality in the process of development of humankind's civilization into the 21st century. However, lots of difficulties and obstacles still block the way to the progress of this cause.

c. The concrete historical standpoint

The historical approach pays attention to studying the process of shaping and development of gender inequality in each specific country, nation and each specific stage of historical development of humankind, linked with different cultures and religions. The concrete historical approach helps to clear up the general laws as well as particular characteristics of each historical period, in each country, nation, in the process of development of the gender equality problem.

The history of Vietnamese women, their role and status, the relations between women and men are not separated from the development of the Vietnamese nation in each historical stage of the mode of production, cultural characteristics, struggle for national liberation, etc.

Therefore, in order to study the present situation of Vietnamese women, we should evaluate the actual state of Vietnamese society in the process of "Renovation". At the same time, we should take into account Vietnamese historical traditions, the influence of various cultures and religions such as Buddhism, Confucianism, Catholicism and so on.

Vietnam has undergone a long resistance war and a radical national democratic revolution, in which women constituted a motive force, making a great contribution to the struggle and production of the country and national construction. At the same time, the consequences of those events exerted both positive and negative effects on women.

d. Gender approaching standpoint, an important move from women studies to science on gender

Since the 1990's, the gender approaching standpoint in the consideration of the problem of women and gender equality has been welcomed and

applied in research works as well as in socio-economic programmes and projects. The gender and development theory is now replacing women studies.

This new approach pays attention to the *relations between the two sexes* in all fields; their employment and enjoyment of welfare, their obligations and rights in the family and in society. It clarifies the comparison of status between men and women in the family and society, the causes of disadvantages and weak points of women, the gap between men and women, and the orientation for overcoming this gap and bringing about gender equality in all aspects.

Gender inequality has existed for a long time in the family, together with discrimination against women under the impact of traditional culture, customs, habits and religious prescripts. This situation underestimates the abilities and labour of women in production and management, confining them to a low position in the family and in society. As a consequence, they suffer great disadvantages and injustice.

Women studies failed to make distinction between the invariable natural (inborn) biological characteristics of men and women, and the social characteristics of both sexes, which are shaped through training, maintained and consolidated by customs, habits, culture, and religions, the characteristics that can change in space and time. Gender characteristics have concrete historical characters, influenced by the material and spiritual living conditions of each nation, country, locality, social class or stratum, as well as by the level of development of humans' culture and civilization.

In women studies, it is necessary to pay attention to women's natural characteristics, especially women's reproductive function and its influence on women's health and activity. But it would be completely wrong to regard the natural characteristics as the decisive invariable factors that dominate the totality of social gender characteristics. For instance, the distribution of labour between men and women in production, in household maintenance activities, the management role of men and of women in the family and in society.

Any research works that are centered only on the study of women's specific characteristics and particular problems, separated from common issues of both genders and lacking the analysis and comparison of situations of men and women in necessary cases will cause disadvantages for women themselves. The research will yield only limited results, lacking a comprehensive approach in the general analysis of the situation of both genders, of the gap between them and so on. The proposed measures to solve the problems will be not radical, and not related to realities.

The *gender approaching viewpoint* in the study of women's problems aims to overcome the above weak points. Research on women is done with the *comparison between women and men*, paying attention to their natural functions as well as social functions, the distribution of labour in production and in family affairs, and the starting point of both sexes to progress themselves. This helps to understand the different difficulties and favourable conditions of men and women who are not yet on an equal footing to gain positions – economic, social, and political – in the family and in society. Hence, the measures to overcome the difficulties and develop the favourable conditions can not be the same for both sexes, although they depend on the common socio-economic situation of the country.

The socio-economic development projects and programmes based on the exact indexes on both genders can make clear the needs, interests, and role of each gender, as well as the positive or negative consequences from these projects themselves, and the motive force for implementing them. On this basis, plans can be devised to mobilize men or women and to encourage their active participation therein.

The goal of gender studies is to *change the awareness of gender*, to eliminate the old mode of thinking and prejudices that consider the natural inborn role and responsibilities of women in the family and society as pre-arrangement of God, which everybody has to accept.

The change in awareness will lead to *changes in attitude and actions*, helping to eliminate unjust treatment toward women in employment and

in the enjoyment of welfare, in daily relations between the sexes, particularly the relations between political leaders, policy-makers and the large masses of women.

The gender approaching standpoint is a new one as it situates women in the context of social relation in connections with men in the family and society. *The gender and development theory is the basis of women studies.* From women studies to science on gender is a fundamental step of development. The object of women studies is the woman herself. *For science on gender, the objects of study are both the woman and the man.* So, science on gender is based on two disciplines: women studies and men studies.

The gender approaching standpoint based on the scientific and objective analysis of the real situation of both sexes is not a partial view inclined either to the feminine or the masculine gender only. However, basing itself on realities of life, the sound analysis of genders will expose the weak points and disadvantages of women in many fields, especially in work and enjoyment of welfare, and the numerous injustices they are suffering. Therefore, it is necessary to have orientations and plans of action, with effective measures, to practise gender equality in all fields, bring into play the ability and creativity of both genders, create union and harmony between them in the interest of individuals and families, and also in the interest of the national development.

In fact, *masculine and feminine genders are not two opposing sides, which liquidate each other*, unable to be brought into accord or are a pair of contradictions. On the contrary, according to the Oriental traditional conception, the masculine is the *yang* and the feminine is the *yin*. *Yang* and *yin* are two principles which are different but are combined in harmony, creating the human strength in the universe and bringing about multiplication and development of the world. They make human beings more abundant, diversified and ensure humankind's sustainability.

Concerning methodology, the gender approaching standpoint requires separate collection of quantitative and qualitative indexes on women and men, together with data on the common state of both genders. This will provide a scientific basis for proper analysis, comparison, and concrete evaluation of the situation of men and women, the causes leading to this situation; it will also help to work out orientations and concrete measures for both sexes to achieve progress, to push up the empowerment of women, so that they can keep pace with men, in the process of national development.

2.3. Women studies and interbranch method of study

The study of women, as said above, may be considered from the angles of many different scientific branches, each branch having its own method of study, of collecting data, indexes, and materials on women. The study of women from the sociological angle differs from that carried out from the historical, ethnological, biological, psychological, or economical angles, although the processes of research and results have close connections, affecting each other and complementing each other to draw out a panoramic picture of women. A good distribution of labour and *close cooperation of different branches in women studies* will bring about satisfactory results for the investigation into women in a comprehensive manner.

At present, *sociology on gender* or women studies in Vietnam utilize mainly the sociological survey method, combining the collection of quantitative data and documents with qualitative researches through meetings of small groups, deep interviews with individuals and families. In research works, as well as in training courses, attention should be paid to the *participatory approach* so as to have the active participation of the objects of study and researchers, to stimulate their initiatives and to collect the opinions and suggestions of the people surveyed and interviewed, and to gather rich, objective, and reliable information, without imposing the subjective mode of thinking, analysis and conclusion.

In the survey of women's activities in one locality (for instance a commune or a district) we should have a *comprehensive method of survey*, not only paying attention to the situation of women but striving also to understand the characteristics of the locality, its geography, population, labour force, economic, political, cultural, social activities, the living conditions of families, etc. On this basis, deep surveys can be made of the situation of gender equality, the real life of women in comparison with men in the context of the locality, in the former's capacity as wives, mothers or sisters in the family, and as citizens. This method will make the plans and measures for ensuring gender equality and improving the living conditions of women of their families, more accurate and effective.

The sociological survey method should be combined with the *concrete historical analysis method* and *logical generalization*, joining together the traditional and the modern. It should consider problems of women and the family in a whole system of social and family relations in natural and social settings.

In more than one decade, since 1987, a rather strong and all-round development step has been made by Vietnam in the study of women and the family, gender equality, with an increase of education and training, formation of cadres, publication of books and reviews.

A number of research works on women, gender and family have been published, together with documents and books by foreign authors translated into Vietnamese. Many newspapers and reviews have made known articles on the subjects of women and gender equality.

Women studies promise to record more new achievements and to contribute to the building and development of science on gender in the near future in Vietnam.

The above standpoints, approaches and methods offer us bases for the examination and analysis of the current situation of gender equality in employment in Vietnam.



Students of Mai Chau Boarding School for Ethnic Minorities, Hoà Bình Province.

Photo: Nhan Sang, Vietnam News Agency

III. FUNDAMENTAL ORIENTATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN AS HUMAN RESOURCES IN VIETNAM

The orientations for development of human resources, the most basic resources for production, are linked with the viewpoints on general human development.

Human development is defined by UNESCO as all-round human development, in the integration of human beings in society to bring into play individual potentialities in different material, intellectual and moral fields; development of humans linked with humane values. This is development that increases material, spiritual, and moral values of humans.

1. Rational use of human resources in Vietnam and sustainable development of human resources

The Resolutions of the Vietnamese Communist Party Central Committee (7th and 8th tenures) underline that human beings, both male and female, both old and young, are the most precious resources of the country, the basic productive force, the target and motive force for the development of society.

The *sustainable development of human resources*, which is understood as *formation, training, and utilization of humans*, male and female workforce, in a rational, scientific, and effective way, has two objectives:

- + To serve in the best way the interests of the working people and their families, helping human beings – through production activities – to develop in all fields: physical, intellectual, and moral, etc.

- + To serve the interests of development of society, of a country, a nation, in a sustainable way.

Therefore, sustainable development of human resources is the result (and target) of rational, scientific, effective utilization of human resources.

At the same time it is the means (and motive force) for utilizing those resources in the best way.

This is related to the following important problems:

a. *Enhancement of labour quality*, bringing into play human potentialities; enhancement of the value of human resources in physical, moral, cultural and professional regards through the development of education, culture, vocational orientation, skill training and retraining, the improvement of the working and living conditions of laborers. It is very important to create for them mobility in occupations, and training skills so that they can change from an occupation to another when necessary.

b. *Best use of workforce* through the creation of enough jobs for the working people, jobs that are effective and can generate relatively high incomes. Rational distribution of workforce to different occupations and economic sectors should be achieved. Due attention should be paid to gender characteristics of the female workers (reproductive function) and others.

c. Close coordination between the policy on labour quality enhancement and human resources enrichment, and *socio-economic development programmes* of the country first and foremost programmes on economic, scientific and technological progress.

d. *Stimulation to active participation and support of broad masses* in national socio-economic development programmes and projects.

2. Utilization of workforce linked with the progress and changes of the economic structure of the country

a. Concerning the *economic structure* in Vietnam, the *1993 Statistical Yearbook* pointed out two groups of industry:

Group bringing forth material products including agriculture, forestry, industry, construction and other branches with the same functions.

Group of services including communication and transport, commerce, finance, banking, social insurance, sciences, education, health care, sports, housing, tourism, hostelry, and State management.

In the book *Actual State of Labour and Employment in Vietnam in 1996*, workforce is divided into three following industry groups:

1) Agriculture (including forestry) using 69.8% of the total number of working people aged 15 upwards.

2) Industry and construction: 10.55%.

3) Services: 19.55%.

b. The International Labour Organization usually divides activities into three sectors:

+ *Sector 1*: Agriculture, pisciculture, fishery, hunting.

+ *Sector 2*: Exploiting industries, manufacturing industries, construction, electricity, water, medical services.

+ *Sector 3*: Commerce, banking, social insurance, communications, transport, treasure and other services.¹

This division aims to make clear the move of workforce from *Sector 1* to *Sector 2* and *Sector 3*, with different speeds and scales, due to specific socio-economic causes.

In many countries of the world, the percentage of workforce in *Sector 1* is decreasing, whereas that of *Sector 2* is increasing. Especially in *Sector 3*, the percentage of development of service branches is roaring up, attracting lots of working people, and occupying a more important position. For instance, in the USA the percentage in *Section 3* was 62.1% in 1970; in Brazil the figure was 38% in 1970, and in the Philippines 33.7% in 1965.

In Vietnam, the branches of material production (agriculture, forestry, industry, construction) occupied 62% of GDP in 1992 while service branches accounted for 38%; the percentage of service branches is increasing rapidly in the last 10 years and involving a great number of female workers.

1. This book was published in 1974 by the ILO Office in Geneva.

3. Characteristics of Vietnamese human resources; female human resources and their utilization

In 1999 the Vietnamese population amounted to 77 million people.¹ How are the Vietnamese human resources characterized quantitatively and qualitatively?

a. The number of working people in Vietnam increase rapidly year after year. According to the *General Statistical Bureau*, the number of people in working age is 32,182,941 in 1990; 36,000,000 in 1994; and it is expected to rise to 42,373,105 in 2000; with an increase of 10 million people against 1990. If the percentage of unemployed workers remains the same as in 1989, two million new jobs should be created in the year 2000.

For many years now, in the Vietnamese population, women have always constituted the majority.

This phenomenon has many causes; including the past wars which killed more men than women. In 1999, women accounted for 51.2% of the total population; life expectancy of women was 68.3 years, while that of men was 65.

However, in comparison with the percentage of working people, the percentage of male workers tends to increase year after year whereas that of female workers shows the tendency to decrease.

In 1990, in the total number of working people, men accounted for 49.36%, and women 50.64%.

In the year 2000, the percentage of men was 50.52% and that of women 49.48%.

But the growth rate of both male and female workers tends to decrease due to the fact that the population growth rate also tends to be falling down.

In 1990 the growth rate of male workers was 3.03%; in the year 2000 the figure was 2.93%.

1. Result of the population census in April 1999.

In 1990 the growth rate of female workers was 2.53%; in the year 2000 it was 2.51%.

Considering the *economically active population* by locality and gender, we see that in 1993 (See *Table 1*) in rural areas, this population accounted for 80% of the total population (men 38.78%; women 41.75%); in urban areas this population accounted for 19.47% of the total population (men 9.21%; women 10.25%).

We can notice an extremely high extent of concentration of the *economically active population in rural areas*, with women being the majority (52%). In all age groups, the percentage of female workers was high; especially women of the age-group 20 to 44 accounted for 83-89% of the total of working women. There was a very great female workforce in rural areas, aged 16 to 59; it was 3.5 times greater than the female workforce in urban areas.

In rural areas women start to participate in production activities early. Girls aged 10 can already help their families in housework and old women aged 65-70 still go to work in the rice field (rice transplanting, weeding, harvest, animal husbandry, etc).

b. Actual state of employment in rural and urban areas

Based on the regulations on employment of the International Labour Organization, the survey conducted in Vietnam in 1992-1993, showed that among the economically active population, 92.63% had jobs (in rural areas: 93.13%, in urban areas 90.56%) and 7.37% lacked jobs.

Among the population who had jobs, 48.47% were men and 51.53% were women.

Among the unemployed people, 42.60% were men and 57.94% were women.

Apparently, the *percentage of the population having jobs* was much higher than that of totally unemployed people

At present, unemployment tends to increase. In urban areas, the percentage of unemployed workers is higher than in rural areas.

In 1997, the percentage of unemployed workers in urban areas was 6%. In some large cities, the percentage of unemployed workers rose to 7-8%.¹

In 1999 the percentage of unemployed workers in urban areas was 6.85%. Particularly in Hanoi City, unemployed workers accounted for 9% of the total number of working people.²

However, the big problem here is the low standard of working conditions, low quality and effectiveness of labour. The common situation of workers, of both sexes in rural and in urban areas, is not "total unemployment", but "employment shortage" or lack of jobs that can *bring enough incomes to ensure families' livelihood*.

The salaries of urban laborers are insufficient to meet the needs of their families. Therefore many of them have to do extra jobs in the evening or on holidays. In rural areas, the population keeps increasing but land for production is limited. The average area of land (including gardens, ponds, lakes) per capita is decreasing. It has fallen from 3 *sào* to presently 1 *sào* (1 *sào* = 360 m²).

Job shortage is very serious and has the tendency to become graver. The people in working age are using 71.13% of the total working time (in 1997 this percentage was 73.14%).³ *Job shortage is particularly serious in the plains* where land is limited whereas population is crowded (27.65% of rural workers lack jobs).⁴

Farmers have to leave their villages and go to find jobs in other localities, mainly in cities and towns. They also go to the Northern mountain areas, to the Central Highlands, to the remote areas in the South to earn their living. Many people go to work abroad. The financial and monetary turmoil in Southeast Asia in 1997 has affected the export of Vietnamese labour.

1. Nguyễn Thị Hằng, *Communist Review*, July 1999.

2. Op. cit.

3. Nguyễn Thị Hằng, *Communist Review*, July 1999.

4. Op. cit

Generally speaking, 80% of unemployed workers are young people; the majority of them having not received any professional training.

c. Quality of labour

Speaking about the quality of labour, we should consider the educational and professional standards of workers, as well as their business management capabilities.

Table 1: Economically active and non-active population by sex and area in 1993

	Male		Female		Total %
	Rural areas	Urban areas	Rural areas	Urban areas	
Economically active population (comparison between rural and urban areas, men and women)	38.78	9.21	41.75	10.25	100%
Total percentage of populations in urban and rural areas	86.19	74.41	82.59	30.92	81.71
Economically non-active population (comparison between rural and urban areas, men and women)	27.76	14.15	39.92	18.77	100%
Total percentage of populations in rural and urban areas	12.01	25.59	17.41	29.08	19.29

Source: *Surveys of the living standard of the Vietnamese population in 1992-1993*.
General Statistical Bureau, 1993.

Table 2: Actual state of employment of the economically active population by sex and area in 1993 (%)

Economically active population	Area		Sex		Total %
	Rural	Urban	Male	Female	
With jobs	80.97	19.03	48.47	51.53	100%
	93.03	90.56	93.54	91.79	92.63
Without jobs	75.08	24.92	42.06	57.94	100%
	6.87	9.44	6.46	8.21	7.37
Total	80.54	19.46	48.00	52.00	100%
	100	100	100	100	100%

Source: *Surveys of the living standard of the Vietnamese population in 1991-1993*.
General Statistical Bureau, 1993.

Table 3: Actual state of employment of working people aged 15 upwards

Having permanent jobs				Having no permanent jobs			
Total	Female	In working age		Total	Female	In working age	
		Total	Female			Total	Female
34,907,639	17,731,924	33,949,129	16,404,055	958,217	419,408	946,148	411,686
	50.79%		49%		43.76%		43.51%
Rural areas	14,542,63	27,231,143	13,394,084	583,765	255,594	573,372	249,093
28,444,058	51.12%		49.18%		43.78%		43.29%

Table 4: Percentage of literate population aged 10 upwards by sex and area in 1993

	Female		Male		Total	
	Literate	Illiterate	Literate	Illiterate	Literate	Illiterate
Rural areas	79.99	20.01	90.08	9.92	84.76	15.24
Urban areas	90.73	9.27	96.30	3.70	93.38	6.67
Total	82.31	17.69	91.40	8.60	86.60	13.40

Source: *Surveys of the living standard of the Vietnamese population in 1992-1993*.
General Statistical Bureau, September 1994.

Table 5: Educational standard of the population aged 15 upwards by sex (1994)

Educational standard	Male (%)	Female (%)
Not yet graduated from the primary school	52.3	58.2
Already graduated from the primary school	27.1	21.4
Graduated from the secondary general school	8.2	5.1
Secondary vocational school	12.4	2.7
College and University level upwards	1.9	1.0

Source: *Vietnamese Population and Development 1990-1995*.
National Committee for Population and Family Planning.

Table 6: Formation of technical workers and university students (1,000 students)

School year	1991-92	1994-95	1995-96
Technical workers of the regular educational system	60.1	74.7	58.7
Central schools	31.9	31.2	37.3
Local schools	28.2	43.3	21.4
University students	106.9	203.3	297.9

Source: Article by Hà Huy Tinh in *Communist Review*, July 1999.

Table 7: Population 5 years of age and older; classified by school attendance and sex (1999 housing and population census; Thế Giới Publishers, 2000)

Total population		Currently attending school		No longer attending school		Never attending school		Undefined
69,058,547 persons		19,009,832 persons 27.52%		43,257,166 persons 62.63%		6,781,459 persons 9.8%		100,90 persons
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
33,733,435 persons 48.84%	35,325,092 persons 51.16%	10,143,738 persons 53.36%	8,866,094 persons 46.37%	21,067,975 persons 48.70%	22,189,191 persons 51.30%	2,516,838 persons 37.11%	4,264,621 persons 62.89%	

Table 8: Population 5 years of age and older attending or having finished general school; classified by urban/rural area and sex (1999 housing and population census)

Total population	Urban area	Rural area
18,437,021 persons	4,017,620 persons	14,419,401 persons
Male 9,840,550 persons 53.37%	Male 2,109,588 persons 52.50%	Male 7,730,992 persons 53.61%
Female 8,596,442 persons 46.63%	Female 1,908,032 persons 47.5%	Female 6,688,409 persons 46.39%

Regarding educational standard, in 1993, among the population aged 10 upwards, 86% were literate, and 13.4% were illiterate. The percentage of literate women was 82.3%, lower than that of men (91.40%).

In 1994 among the population aged 18 upwards, 27% of men and 21% of women were graduates from the primary school; 8.2% of men and 5.1% of women were graduates from the secondary general school; 1.9% of men and 1% of women were graduates from colleges/or universities (See Table 5). At the higher levels of education, the percentage of graduates is decreasing, especially with regard to women.

Generally speaking, *the professional standard of workers is low*. In 1989 among the population aged 15 upwards, the working people without professional expertise accounted for 90.9% (men: 88.1%, women 93.3%); technical workers with graduation diplomas accounted for 2.2%, technical workers without such diplomas 1.8%; secondary school graduates: 3.2%; college and university graduates: 1.2%.

The percentage of women with professional expertise is lower than that of men at all levels. In particular, the percentage of people with post-university education is low, and the percentage of women is much lower than that of men.

In general, the contingent of workers has a very low level of technical skill. Besides, it is *not distributed rationally*. In 1997, the number of workers having undergone technical training accounted for 16%; 45% of technical workers were concentrated in the State economic sector.

In industrial production, workers occupied only 10% of the social workforce, but the percentage of technical workers here rose to 40% of the total; 73% of the social workforce were engaged in agriculture, but there were here only 15% of the total number of technical workers.

The scale of training technical workers tends to be decreasing (See Table 6).

Concerning the *business management capacity* of the working people, the long lasting State subsidies mechanism had brought about the habit of waiting for decisions of leaders and managers'. Laborers showed little initiative in work and this limited their creativity. At the same time, attention was paid only to the training of workers, but not much to training a contingent of managers.

d) Current obstacles to the rational utilization of human resources in Vietnam

While the number of workers is great and increases continuously, the quality of labour is low in both aspects: educational standard and professional level. In particular, the quality of labour of female workers is lower than that of male workers. The *lack of high quality workforce* in different branches and at different levels is leading to the fact that many people are unemployed but have not enough capabilities to undertake new jobs, failing to meet the requirements of modern technology in production, and having no management abilities.

This is currently a big problem, a serious obstacle to the rational utilization of human resources in Vietnam, especially with regard to female workforce.

In recent years, *the number of unemployed workers has been increasing*, due to the impact from the reorganization of State enterprises and organs, the reduction of staff, the closing of a number of factories, the dissolution of many loss-suffering co-operatives.

The majority of people who lost jobs were women, usually those with poor health and low level of professional skill. It will be very difficult for them to find employment, if they are not retrained to adapt themselves to new jobs or to find capital for organizing new business.¹

The *recent economic crisis in Southeast Asia* has affected the employment of Vietnamese female workers. In many female worker-intensive

1. In 1990: 350,000 people; in 1991: 500,000 people, of whom 60-65% were women.

production branches such as the textile and garment industry or leather industry, the reduction of exported goods has entailed the decrease of production. According to the General Corporation of Textiles and Garments, in 1997-1998, nearly 10% of its workers had to quit jobs, and 80% of them were women. The remaining workers had to accept a 20-25% reduction of their wages, or to prolong their working time to 10-12 hours per day.¹

The Vietnamese population continues to increase rapidly; the number of working people thus also increases. The need for jobs is very urgent and pressing. But it surpasses our capabilities to provide training in professional skill and to improve labour quality. Vocational training and education cannot keep pace with the population growth due to limited investments by the State.

In recent years, *the number of illiterate people has increased*. The percentage of literacy is decreasing: in 1989, 83.8% of women and 92.5% of men were literate; in 1993, the figures were only 82.3% and 91.4% respectively.

There is an *increase in the number of children who leave school prematurely* because their families cannot afford to pay school fees. At the same time, families' production requires only simple labour so they do not see the necessity to invest time and money in the education of their children to attain higher levels of knowledge. Between 1988 and 1990, the percentage of school drop-outs increased clearly, especially among school-girls at the end of the first form level and the second level (primary education). The situation was improved in the 1994-1995 school year. In 1998, the State reserved 13% of the total budget for education and training.²

In the *educational system*, reforms are carried out slowly. Many educational contents are not appropriate and do not meet the real needs

1. *Women of Vietnam Review*, 26 July 1999.

2. Nguyễn Thị Hằng. Op. cit.

of economic activities. A general weak point of the present educational system is its tendency to concentrate on general knowledge and theories, with insufficient practice, lacking deep study of special branches and combination of diversified interdisciplinary knowledge. The tendency for commercializing education and training is rather common, focusing mainly on examinations and graduation diplomas, not linking closely education and training to production and the labour market.

Almost all female workers in agriculture and rural areas do not receive any training. Therefore, there is not yet a contingent of competent and dynamic workers to meet the requirements of modern production.

The access to *information and the extent of cultural enjoyment* by the population, especially in rural areas and among women, is very limited. The system of mass-media is still poor, unable to reach mountainous and remote areas. Having no access to information, workers can only have limited knowledge.

The *self-sufficient mode of production*, which is still persistent in a number of localities, particularly mountainous and remote areas, causes obstacles to the development of the commodity economy and the shaping of a free labour market. The low productivity itself is a factor hindering the boost of the economy.

Besides, among the contingent of workers, some *psychological problems* remain, constituting hindrances to their integration into the new working environment, observing new labour discipline and regulations of modern production, of the commodity economy and the market mechanism. All the above factors are presently primary obstacles to the rational utilization of the Vietnamese workforce.

Generally speaking, attention has been paid to the utilization of human resources (employment for laborers) but not much to the *improvement of the value of these resources*, especially that of female workers.

Education and training for them in all fields (cultural, professional, moral, physical) are still inadequate. In the research into labour, employment and income, we should not only think of immediate economic gains, but should also consider the fundamental problems allowing to bring about long-lasting social effectiveness of production, sustainable development of human resources, justice and social progress for all individuals of both sexes.

CHAPTER II

EMPLOYMENT AND LIFE OF WOMEN IN THE COURSE OF DEVELOPMENT OF THE MARKET MECHANISM AND NATIONAL INDUSTRIALIZATION AND MODERNIZATION

I. EMPLOYMENT OF FEMALE WORKERS IN THE COMMODITY ECONOMY WITH A MARKET MECHANISM

I. The new socio-economic policies are opening up prospects for a more rational utilization of male and female human resources

Vietnam has been since 1986 entering a period of all-round Renovation. Thanks to the Vietnamese State's new socio-economic policies warmly supported by the masses, many great changes have occurred, impacting deeply on the life of different social strata, particularly the life of women and their families.

Economically, there is a shift from the bureaucratic centrally planned and State subsidy system to a market mechanism, with the development of various economic sectors and forms of ownership: State, collective, individual, private, etc. In rural areas, the right of long-term land use is entrusted to farmers for production thus pushing up the household economy, allowing free business in many different trades and professions. The State carries out policy on investment and cooperation with foreign countries to step up the process of renovating techniques and technologies, industrializing and modernizing the country, in both rural and urban areas.

Regarding the *socio-political* field, democracy has been developed in the economic, political, cultural, ideological activities of the population, and efforts are being made to build a law-governed State.

At the same time, State subsidies for health care, educational and cultural activities have been reduced, and private services in these fields are being encouraged.

Regarding *international relations*, the Vietnamese State is carrying out an open-door policy, promoting friendship relations and exchanges with different countries in the world, encouraging foreigners to invest in Vietnam, and enhancing the economic, cultural, scientific and technical cooperation of Vietnam with other nations.

These policies of renovation have helped stabilize the Vietnamese economy and improve the living conditions of the Vietnamese.

The GDP growth rate was 5.1% in 1990 and 8.3% in 1992. During the subsequent years, the average growth rate was 7%.

The rate of inflation was brought from 70% in 1990-91 to 10% in 1993.¹

Concerning the Human Development Index (HDI), the United Nations Organization on 13 July 1999 ranked Vietnam 110th among 174 countries. Concerning the gender equality index, Vietnam was ranked 91st among 143 countries.²

Together with the boost of democratic activities, women and their families have more favourable conditions for production and business than in the past. Much progress has been achieved in the practice of gender equality in the family and in society. At the same time, new circumstances entail new difficulties and pose new requirements concerning employment, working conditions, incomes of female workers in the market mechanism.

1. *Economic News* newspaper, 22nd February 1999.

2. *Nhân Dân* daily, 15th July 1999.

From the gender approach, we will consider activities of male and female workers in different trades and professions of the various economic sectors to make clear the situation of gender equality in employment, working conditions, incomes and payment, the progress achieved and the problems to be solved, the responsibility of the State, different ministries and branches as well as the community in the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women in employment.

2. New changes in employment for male and female workers in the market mechanism and the commodity economy

a) The market mechanism and business in the commodity economy bring about many opportunities and favourable conditions for the population in general, women in particular, to find jobs and to develop enterprises in conformity with their abilities and aspirations and to increase their incomes.

In the past, the employment of people was provided chiefly by the State or collective enterprises. They had not enough conditions and faced many difficulties in requesting for permission to organize business by themselves under the forms of household economy or small private enterprises.

At present people of all social strata are encouraged to generate *jobs by themselves*, if they have funds, means of production, and business management capabilities. Production can be carried out at home, in cooperation with other households, or with hired workers.

The fact that workers have many opportunities and favourable conditions to create jobs by themselves and to take the initiative in employment signifies a very important step for their advancement.

Apart from job generation by themselves, workers have the right to apply for jobs anywhere. They have more access to the labour market. They can work for State-owned or private enterprises or not, depending on the working conditions and wages.

The freedom to search for jobs is linked with the *freedom to hire* and select workers for the household economy or private enterprises, with agreement (verbal or written) between the employer and employee on the contents of the work and wages in accordance with State Laws. The employer is no longer subject to criticism for "exploiting" other people.

In pair with the development of many trades and occupations, the need for workforce is increasing in a number of economic areas, particularly in cities, which pushes up the move of populations from locality to locality to search for jobs (those workers' residence is registered temporarily in the new places, while their names remain in the official residence register of their family, in their native village or previous places of residence). The *freedom of workers to move from one place to another* is also linked with the facility of moving from locality to locality thanks to the *development of communication and transport means*.

The development of the *mass media* creates more opportunities for the population to acquire and exchange information on production and consumption. Hence more favourable conditions are created for laborers to find jobs, and for household heads to hire workers and invest in new business. Labourers may stay far from home for several days (to do commerce, services), several weeks or months to participate in the building of various projects. Many people work all the time far from home and return to visit their family only once a year.

This is a common situation in Vietnam at present.

The diverse economic activities are pushing up the *utilization of workers in many different forms* with regard to different age groups.

According to specific jobs and ways of organizing production, the working time can be very flexible; it may last all the day, half a day, all the evening or night, etc. There are jobs that can be done in factories, enterprises, or at home. Households' production can involve even children, old people, pregnant women, women nursing small babies, invalids who are offered light jobs suitable for their health and abilities.

Generally speaking, new policies and the market mechanism have clearly influenced employment generation for the working people. They have boosted diversified crafts and professions and increased the laborer's incomes. The development of the commodity economy chiefly under the form of household, individual and private economy is seen both in rural and urban areas. It stirs the participation of a large section of the workforce. They show many initiatives, prove to be very *dynamic and mobile* in the condition of the market mechanism, creating new jobs, setting up new enterprises, spending money and time on learning new occupations. The incomes and living conditions in general of the working people and their families are being improved.

The many *surveys of households' living standards*, which were made in the comparison of the situation of 1990 with that of 1993, show that 63.83% of the questioned households affirm that they have a better living standard, 27.63% of households say that their living standard remains the same; 8.54% say that in 1993 they had more difficulties than in 1990.¹

So, the incomes of the majority of families *have increased*. But given the minimum daily need per head being 2,000 calories we see that 51% of the population (i.e. more than a half) still live in poverty. The percentage of poor people in rural areas is 57%; that in urban areas is 43%.

In 1993, the monthly per capita income was VND 94,000. The percentage of high-income household was 2.29%; that of households whose incomes were above average was 13.09%; households having average incomes accounted for 38.67%; households having under-average incomes accounted for 23.21%; 22.14% of the households were poor, among them 4.58% were extremely poor. The *differentiation between rich and poor households was obvious*.²

1. Result of the surveys of the household economy in 1994.

2. Result of the surveys of the household economy in 1994.

However, the real incomes of both rich and poor households have grown, partly improving their living conditions. The percentage of poor households has decreased.

In Vietnam in 1989, the percentage of poor households was 55%; in 1993 the figure was 19.9% (for references: in China: 33% in 1970 and 10% in 1990; in Thailand: 26% in 1980 and 16% in 1990; in the Philippines: 35% in 1970 and 21% in 1990; in India 51.5% in 1973 and 23.9% in 1988).¹

The *increasing differentiation* between the rich and the poor is conditioned by the different effects of the Renovation policies and new economic management mechanism on people, of different age-brackets of both sexes, with different educational and professional standards, different business management abilities, and particularly different economic potentialities (capital, land, means of production, workforce).

Many households having material conditions and knowledge of business management have enriched themselves quickly.

Our interviews carried out in 1994 with rich households reveal the following causes of their fortune:

- capital:	83.75%
- workforce:	39.08%
- jobs:	27.59%
- land:	42%
- business plans:	61.67%
- other causes:	11.3%.

b) Different social strata, families and individuals have different difficulties in doing business. However, in general *women encounter more difficulties than men* in searching for jobs.

1. Result of the interviews on the living standard in 1994. General surveys of the household economy in 1994. Statistical Publishing House, 1998.

Due to population pressure, the number of unemployed workers is increasing, and in general, it is difficult for women to compete with men on the labour market. The process of national industrialization and modernization requires more and more laborers with high technical and professional standards. At the same time women in general have lower educational and professional standards than men. In addition, women are busy with their specific functions (childbirth, care for children, doing housework). Therefore they cannot work continuously, work far from home, or in nighttime. Besides, the investment on each female worker (in accordance with the State preferential policy on female workers) has increased from 5% to 15% in comparison with that on each male worker. Therefore, enterprises' owners are not ready to employ female workers.

The market puts its *pressure* on female workers. Those who fail to meet its requirements will face difficulties in searching for jobs. But the market is strongly *attractive, stimulating* workers to strive to make progress, to adapt themselves to the requirements of the new situation, to raise their educational standard and promote their own initiatives to find employment to increase production and make a fortune.

In Vietnam, at present, what occupations are required by the market, which can be suitable for women, i.e. which can *create conditions and opportunities for women* to be involved in them easily?

Here priority should be given to the models which can generate jobs suitable for female workers in different localities and help to prevent unnecessary changes which would lead to social evils. This requires a thorough study of the distribution of workers of both sexes in different occupations and different economic sectors to find rationalities and irrationalities therein.

The creation of conditions and opportunities for workers to generate jobs, the rational distribution of workers of both sexes in different occupations, and different economic sectors are the objectives of the socio-economic policies of the Vietnamese Communist Party and State.

3. Distribution of workers in different occupations and economic sectors

a) Considering the structure of female labour in the total number of women working in different branches of the national economy, up to 1st July 1994 (See Table 9) we find that the percentage of women working in agriculture, forestry and pisciculture was 72.1%. In recent years, non-agricultural occupations have been developed, but not yet vigorously. Until 1993, 83.8% of rural women and 20% of urban women were still engaged in agriculture, forestry and pisciculture. Most of them worked in accordance with traditional experience. They received very little professional technical training (up to now in those branches small machines have not been used much because many workers are unemployed and they are ready to commit manual work for low wages). In those branches, incomes are low, and the big gap between the price of industrial products and that of agricultural products brings about great losses for agricultural workers.

The second female labour-intensive industry is the processing industry where female workers account for 8.8% of the total of working women (food, food-stuffs, textiles, garments, leather processing). These workers coming from both urban and rural areas may work in enterprises or at home.

The third comes commercial branches where female workers account for 8.4% of the total number of working women. They are doing business under many different forms: middle-sized or small shops on streets, stands in markets, petty trade and so on. Women can be shop owners, or hired workers in shops and stores, or they can undertake door-to-door sales of goods.

Then comes the education and training branch where female workers account for 3.5% of the total number of working women. Health care and social security services involve up to 1.3% of the total number of working women.

In other occupations, the percentage of female workers is very low.

Table 9: Structure of female labour in the total number of women working in different branches of the national economy and different economic sectors (1st July 1994)

Branches of the National Economy	Percentage of working women (in comparison with the total number of women)	State sector	Non- State sector
Total percentage of women working in the whole country	100%	100%	100%
1. Agriculture and forestry	72.1	9.9	77.6
2. Pisciculture	0.6	0.2	0.6
3. Exploiting industries	0.2	1.5	0.1
4. Manufacturing industries	8.8	22.3	7.6
5. Electricity - Gas - Water	0.2	0.6	0.2
6. Construction	1.0	5.0	0.6
7. Commerce - Reparation of utensils	8.4	7.4	8.5
8. Hostelry	0.6	1.2	0.5
9. Transport-Warehousing-Information	0.6	4.0	0.2
10. Finance and credit	0.4	2.4	0.2
11. Science and technology	0.1	0.7	0.04
12. Activities related to property trading, consultancy services	0.1	0.5	0.08
13. State management, national defence and security	0.4	3.6	0.1
14. Education and training	3.5	30.6	1.1
15. Healthcare and social security	1.3	0.5	0.8
16. Culture and sports	0.2	0.8	0.1
17. Party and mass organizations' activities	0.2	1.7	0.1
18. Activities in service of individuals and the community	1.0	0.5	1.0
19. Paid household maintenance activities	0.2		0.2

Source: Data on Vietnamese female workers in 1997

Examining the above female labour structure, we see that it is essentially the same structure that has existed for decades now. The process aimed at distributing female workers to different economic branches in a more rational way to bring interests to women still faces lots of difficulties and obstacles, related to the general development of the Vietnamese economy.

b) Considering the *structure of occupations of both men and women* in 1992-1993 (See Table 10), we see that 71% of men and women are engaged in agriculture, forestry, and pisciculture; 9.5% in industry; 9.2% in commerce and hostelry. Only a very small percentage participate in other occupations. Those data prove that *Vietnam basically remains an agricultural country*, with a great number of workers concentrated in agriculture and forestry, while other economic branches are not yet developed.

Comparing the percentage of female workers with that of male workers in different economic branches of Vietnam in 1996 (See Table 14), we find that in *commerce*, female workers account for 71.3% of the total number of workers, while the percentage of male workers is 29.7%. In fact, commerce is a *traditional* trade of women. At present, most of traders in markets, itinerant dealers, petty traders are women, who are found both in rural and urban areas.

Table 10: Main occupations of the economically active population in 12 months prior to the day of the interview, by sex and by occupation, 1992-1993 (%).

	Rural areas		Urban areas		Structure by sex		Structure by occupation
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
- Agriculture, forestry, pisciculture	20	24.2	83.1	83.2	51.8	48.2	71.1
- Mining industry	0.45	0.84	0.05	0.4	22.5	77.5	0.3
- Industry	23.6	27	5.71	6.2	49.6	50.4	9.5
- Electricity	0.23	0.5	0.02	0.17	21	79	0.1
- Construction	1	6.3	0.07	1.7	9.4	90.6	1.3
- Commerce and hostelry	38.9	13.6	7.5	2.6	76	24	9.2
- Communication and transport	0.9	9	0.16	1.73	9.6	90.4	1.6
- Finance, social insurance	0.38	0.75	0.02	0.15	26.1	73.9	0.2
- Other occupations	14.2	16.2	3.4	3.8	48	51.3	6
- Total	100	100	100	100	52.2	47.8	100

Source: Surveys of the living standard of the Vietnamese population in 1992-93. General Statistical Bureau.

Table 11: Distribution of the economically active population in different economic sectors in 1994 (%)

	Female	Male
Household economy	76.4	67.8
Private enterprises	10.3	16.4
Production groups	0.4	1.1
Cooperatives	0.3	0.6
Joint enterprises	0.6	0.9
State economic sector	12.1	13.1
Total	100	100

Source: Surveys of 11 provinces of South Vietnam's eastern part in 1994 by the Ministry of Labour.

Table 12: Population 13 years of age and older, classified by type of activity and sex

Total population 13 years of age and older	Classified by type of activity											
	Working				Doing housework				Attending school			
	Losing labour capability				Not working				Undefined			
	Having need for work				Not having need for work							
54,473,812 persons	36,431,072 persons				4,098,066 persons				7,153,545 persons			
% in comparison with total 13-year-old population	66.87%				7.52%				13.13%			
% in male/female comparison	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
	51.5	48.4	5.36	94.6	55.4	44.5	47.6	52.3	56.6	43.3	43.1	56.8

Source: 1999 Housing and Population Census.

Table 13: Population 13 years of age and older having constantly jobs over the last 12 years; classified by economic sector and sex.

Total population	State-owned		Collective		Private		Individual		Mixed		Foreign		Undefined
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
36,431,072 persons	3,506,073		9,779,583		260,131		22,309,368		344,419		191,681		39,817
% in comparison with total	9.62%		26.84%		0.71%		61.23%		0.94%		0.52%		0.10
% in male/female comparison	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
	52.84	47.16	45.55	54.55	59.38	40.62	54.13	45.87	47.82	52.18	28.04	71.9	

Source: 1999 Housing and Population Census.

In *agriculture and forestry*, women account for 52% of the total number of workers, and men 48%. Men and women still represent a great percentage in agricultural production. Particularly, as land is entrusted to farmers for production on a long-term contractual basis, 70% of rural household heads are men.

Table 14: Percentage of female workers in a number of economic branches

	1991 (%)	1996 (%)
1. Percentage of women in the total workforce	52.09	52.96
2. Percentage of women in the total number of workers having jobs:		51.45
- In State economic sector	48.5	47.04
- In non-State economic sectors	46.66	51.54
3. Percentage of women in a number of branches:		
- Commerce	58	71.3
- Education and training	70	71
- Health care	60	68
- Light industry	63.6	65
- Tourism		56.3
- Finance and credit		56
- Banking	56.8	54
- Processing industry		53.3
- Public services		52.1
- Agriculture, food industry	51.7	52
- Forestry		40.4
- Post	50.6	52
- Aviation	36	47
- Chemical production	26.3	35.2
- Foreign affairs	30	33.7
- Science and technology		35.5
- Gymnastics and sports		32.7
- Culture		30
- Metallurgical industry		30
- Energy		30
- Communication and transport		28
- Water conservancy		28
- Construction		24

Source: General Statistical Bureau, 1996.

However, we should pay attention to the fact that many men have left their villages to go to search for employment in cities and towns. They may stay in urban areas for several years, but their names remain in the official residence register of their family and thus they continue to be regarded as agricultural workers.

In *education and training*, 71% of workers are women, and 29% men. In *health care* services, 68% of workers are women, and 32% men. In these branches, women have constituted the majority since the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1945. Those occupations are considered suitable for women, bringing into play the potential of women. Moreover the percentage of female workers in both branches is respectively only 3.5% and 1.3% of the total number of working women. However, if we compare the percentage of female workers with that of male workers, we will find that these two branches involve the highest proportions of female workers in comparison with all other branches of the national economy.

In *public service* branches that have appeared only in recent years, women account for 52.1% of the total number of workers, and men 48%. These branches are also considered suitable for women.

The *processing industry*, a traditional branch for women, has now a percentage of female workers being 53.3%. In modern processing industry branches, many working stages are now performed by machines.

The number of women in enterprises with modern advanced technologies is still small. Most of them undertake simple technical jobs with low wages.

In 1996, women constituted the majority of the workforce in a number of branches such as energy (70%), construction (70%), communications and transport (72%), irrigation (72%), culture and sports (70%), chemical production (65%). These branches require physical strength (construction, transport), high technical levels (electricity, gas) or have working conditions which are not suitable for women (chemical production) or women

are traditionally not involved in (cultural and sport activities). In science, technology and foreign affairs, the percentage of female workers is rather low: 33%. But if advanced technologies are applied, the working conditions are improved, and women's educational and professional standards are raised, the percentage of female workers in all those branches may increase. For instance, in information, sports and cultural branches, the percentage of female workers is increasing.

c) Considering the situation of female labour force in *urban and rural areas* (Table 10), we find that in 1992-93 in urban areas, 23.6% of the total number of female workers were engaged in Industry; 38.9% in commerce; in rural areas 83.1% of female workers were engaged in agriculture and forestry, only 5.7% in industry and 7.5% in commerce. So, in rural areas, the shift of women from agriculture to non-agricultural occupations is still not strong.

d) Considering the *different economic sectors* in 1994, the majority of workers were involved in the household economy (76.4% of female workers and 67.8% of male workers). The State sector absorbed 12.1% of female workers and 13.1% of male workers; the private sector: 10.3% and 16.1% respectively; the collective sector: 0.3% and 0.6% respectively (See Table 9).

In 1990, the individual and private economic sectors attracted 88% of the total number of workers of Vietnam. In 1991, those sectors created 63% of our GDP and 71% of national income.¹

The surveys conducted by the General Statistical Office in 1992-1993 show that among the people, who had jobs, 83.2% were self-employed, 9.17% worked in the private sector and 6.52% in the State sector. Apparently, *the number of self-employed workers is very high*. In recent years, the number of people doing business in the informal sector and

1. *Renovation of Business Management in Vietnam*. National Political Publishing House, p.p. 15-18.

running small enterprises, (which utilizes the family workforce or hires some workers) is growing rapidly.

In short, under the effect of the Vietnamese State's Renovation policy started in 1986; the distribution of female workers has the following outstanding features:

a) There are changes, although not yet great, in the participation of women in different branches of the national economy.

The number of female workers in agriculture and forestry has decreased but it has increased in industries producing consumer goods, processing food and foodstuffs, manufacturing textiles, garments and leather articles. Especially the female workforce has doubled in commerce and service branches. Some new occupations have appeared with women being the core workforce (mainly in urban areas).

In general, occupations involving urban women are much more diversified than those of rural women.

b) Considering ownership relations and production organization, we can see a rather sharp decrease of the female workforce in the State economic sector and the collective sector (old cooperative model), coupled with a rapid increase in the number of women working in the private, individual, and household economic sectors.

The number of women workers in the State and collective economic sectors has decreased drastically. The majority of them have moved to the individual sector and household economy.

At present, a great number of women are working in the private, individual, and household economic sectors. However, only a small number of women work for wages; most women are self-employed. Particularly in the household economy most women are occupying themselves with all jobs together with their husbands and children, thus hiring not many laborers.

The *informal economic sector* in Vietnam includes all private individual, household economic activities not officially registered with the State. Women in this sector, including traders, have no fixed place of production, no fixed place for selling their goods; they have permanent or temporary jobs, do business in a flexible way.

In the informal economic sector, there is a great number of women, accounting for 70% of the total number of people working on the streets, selling food, foodstuffs, flowers, fruits, collecting wasted materials, old books, doing petty trade in markets, with small capital and low income.

c) Although a very great proportion of women participate in production activities, female workers still have to bear a *heavy burden of housework in comparison with male workers*.

On average, men work 54 hours more each month out of the family than women. But women have to carry out household maintenance activities more than men (at least 4 hours a day) therefore, in fact, women labour more than men.¹

Women's incomes are lower than men's (in cash) because household maintenance unpaid work is not considered a production activity. This affects greatly the position of women in the family, their employment and productivity in society.

Children, especially those of poor families in rural areas, start participating very early in production. *Girl children* often drop out of school earlier than their boy peers to help their families in housework and a number of farmwork: to cut grass, to tend cattle, etc. Girls are working for more hours than boys, especially in the age group of 15 to 17.

In general, women have less condition than men to raise their educational and professional standard due to the heavy burden of production work and housework.

1. *Vietnam through the Gender Prism*, p. 6.

In a word, the present distribution of workers in different branches reflects the situation of the Vietnamese economy, which is basically based on agriculture. The effects of the process of national industrialization and modernization on production branches and on employment for laborers are still very limited. Therefore, radical changes have not yet recorded in women's employment, especially in rural areas.

Proceeding from the gender approach to the distribution of labour between women and men, we see that women are concentrated in a number of occupations. This situation reflects the disadvantages of women who do not have the conditions and opportunities to participate in a number of occupations they like, especially occupations with high productivity that generate good incomes because they have a heavy responsibility in child-care and family affairs. This long-standing "natural" division of labour causes gender inequality in the search for and selection of jobs. Women are often concentrated in manual, simple jobs with low productivity and low incomes, which they have to accept in order to have time to take care of their children and families.

The changes in the economic mechanism over the past years have impacted on the employment and incomes of both sexes, bringing about many favourable conditions for them.

But women are experiencing more difficulties and disadvantages than men. The possibility to find and maintain jobs of women is much lower than that of men. Graduated female students have more difficulties than their male peers in finding jobs.

Women are working for more hours than men, but their incomes are lower than that of the latter.

When enterprises and businesses carry out organizational readjustment and staff reduction, 60% of the workers who have to quit jobs are women.

This problem should be further investigated in the analysis of the situation of female workers in different economic branches and sectors, in urban and rural areas, including hired female workers and self-employed women.

II. FEMALE WORKERS IN URBAN AREAS IN THE PROCESS OF ECONOMIC RE-STRUCTURING, INDUSTRIALIZATION AND MODERNIZATION OF PRODUCTION

1. Impacts of economic re-structuring, development of the market economy, and industrialization and modernization of production on urban female wage-earners

The salient point in the comparison of male and female workers is that men are more likely to be wage-earners than women. Women are usually self-employed. Most women in agriculture and forestry engage themselves in sufficient production. Their produce is intended chiefly for feeding their family; only a small amount of it is sold on the market. Therefore, their incomes (in cash) are small, and it is difficult to calculate in cash the results of their labour.

Among the population aged 15 upwards, who have permanent jobs, only 17% are wage-earners.

Women account for 41.46% of the total number of wage-earners; in urban areas, the figure is 42.3% and in rural areas, 40.78%.

Forty-five percent of the population aged 15 upwards who have permanent jobs are engaged in the *household economy*. They are self-employed, or they do themselves business with the help of some hired workers.

Women make up 69% of those people; in urban areas the figure is 61.5% and in rural areas: 70% (Table 15).

In general, single women tend to work for wages more than women with small babies. Women with higher educational standards tend to be wage-earners more than those with low educational standards.

So, how are female workers in urban areas, especially wage-earners affected by the process of economic re-structuring, market economy development, industrialization and modernization?



Highly-skilled workers building a 6,500-ton ship at Bạch Đằng Ship-yard, Hải Phòng City.
Photo: Đinh Trâm, Vietnam News Agency

The objectives of industrialization are to apply new technologies to production and to change the mode of business management in order to increase productivity, product quality and the Gross Domestic Product. But besides the *positive aspects* of the industrialization process (especially *economic effectiveness*), in the conditions of a market economy, a series of *social problems* have arisen concerning urbanization, the reduced need for human workforce due to higher skills, which leads to increasing unemployment, the development of social evils, the increasing pollution of the environment, etc. Production and business are aimed at earning the *highest profits*. The motive force for entrepreneurs is economic effectiveness, which means *fierce competition* on the market regarded as a battlefield where each entrepreneur strives to defeat others.

2. Actual state of labour and employment in urban areas

Labour and employment in urban areas are subject to the impact of two important factors. Firstly, the process of *urbanization* entails the rapid development of cities and towns, and the increase of the urban population, including those whose residence is officially registered and free migrants who come from the countryside.

Table 15: Population aged 15 upwards having permanent jobs, and their positions in production relationships

a) Total number in the whole country:

- 34,907,659 people; 50.8% of them: women.
- Wage-earners: 5,953,394 people; 41.46% of them: women.
- Entrepreneurs not hiring any worker;
- 12,863,105 people; 33.43% of them: women.
- Entrepreneurs hiring workers:
- 244,700 people: 26.1% of them: women.
- Household economy workers:
- 15,723,610 people; 69% of them: women.
- Others: 120,834 people; 41.25% of them: women.

b) In urban areas:

- 6,463,621 people; 49.5% of them: women.
- Among wage-earners, women account for 42.3%.
- Among entrepreneurs not hiring any worker: women account for 52%.
- Among entrepreneurs hiring workers: women account for 27.12%.
- Among household economy workers: women account for 61.54%.

c) In rural areas:

- 28,444,078 people; 51.12% of them: women
- Among wage-earners, women account for 40.78%.
- Among entrepreneurs not hiring any worker: women account for 30%.
- Among entrepreneurs hiring workers: women account for 25%.
- Among household economy workers: women account for 70%.

Source: *Selected Results of the Large Scale Surveys of the Year 1990-1996*.
Statistical Publishing House, 1998.

Table 16: Restructuring in the utilization of workers, by economic sector (%)

Year	State sector	Non-State sector
1985	15	85
1990	11.3	88.7
1991	10.1	89.9
1992	9.5	90.5
1993	9.1	90.9

Source: *Statistical Yearbook* from 1985 to 1993

Secondly, the process of restructuring *economic sectors*, with some curtailment of the State sector, the expansion and diversification of activities of non-State sectors (See table 16).

Together with the boost of economic, political, cultural activities, big cities like Hanoi, Hồ Chí Minh City, Hải Phòng, Đà Nẵng and others have been expanded. The populations there have increased rapidly. Several other cities and towns have also developed, attracting large masses of migrants from the neighbouring localities.

In 1989, the urban population (permanent population) rose to 12,260,000 people; (women: 51.9% and men: 48.1%).

In 1994, the urban population increased to 14,139,300 people; (women: 51.2%; men: 48.8%).

In particular in Hanoi in 1994, the population rose to 2,194, 400 people; (women: 50.9%; men: 49.1%).

In Hồ Chí Minh City, the population rose to 4,391,900 people (women: 52%; men: 48%).

According to the population census carried out in April 1999, Hanoi has 2,672,122 people, and Hồ Chí Minh City, 5,037,155 people.

Besides, there is a migratory flow of rural people to cities and towns to search for jobs everyday. It is difficult to have an accurate number of them. A survey carried out in 1996 by the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs gave the figure of 2,042,685 people aged 15 upwards coming from the countryside to cities and towns (during the 12 months of the survey). Among them 48.83% were women. The highest percentage of women was found in the Red River Delta: 51.17%; the lowest percentage was found in the eastern part of South Vietnam: 36.29%.

In Hanoi, up to the end of 1995, there were 62,420 people coming from different provinces to stay in Hanoi, a figure tripling that of 1990. Jobless peasants who come from the countryside to cities are doing all kinds of work. They often have to accept manual tiresome jobs that urban people would be reluctant to do, although those jobs bring about only low incomes. Rural women coming to cities are often engaged in small-scale trade, petty trade, doing housework for families, cleaning dishes in restaurants, etc.

So, urban female workers not only have to compete with male workers but also with female workers coming from the countryside.

According to the surveys carried out in 1996, in urban areas, women accounted for 49.39% of the total number of people having permanent

jobs, 43.74% of the total number of people having no permanent jobs. A great number of women have moved to the non-State and informal economic sectors.

In the State sector, the percentage of female wage-earners has decreased.

The process of industrialization in Vietnam, with the development of the market mechanism, is posing new requirements for workers of both sexes. It requires higher professional skills and quality of work and rigid working schedules. Women with their attendant functions prove to be in a weak position compared to men on the labour market. The consequence is the loss of jobs of a number of women in the process of reorganization and staff reduction in enterprises. Many women have to change their occupations because they turn out to be no more qualified for them. Unemployed women have many difficulties in searching for jobs in the formal economic sectors. The female workers who remain in the formal sectors often have to accept simple low-paid jobs. The women who have moved to the informal economic sectors (about 80%) have to accept unstable low-paid jobs.

3. Labour in the State economic sector; changes and difficulties in the Renovation period

The restructuring of the State economic sector entails the readjustment of the organization, reduction of the staff, and the disbanding of loss-suffering enterprises. Great changes have taken place in State enterprises.

The number of State enterprises went down from 12,000 in 1990 to 7,000 in 1992 by different ways: dissolution (2,000 enterprises), incorporation (3,000 enterprises) and so on. In this course of reorganization, one third of the total of workers (2.4 million) have moved to private, individual economic sectors. Bank investments in State enterprises has decreased from 90% to 70%. The attraction of workers by the State sector has decreased gradually. On average, between 1976 and 1980, 7.6% of

workers were absorbed by the State sector; this percentage decreased to 4% in the period 1981-1985; and 0.9% in the period 1986-1990.

About 800,000 workers (65.7% of them were women) left their jobs.¹

In fact, there was a strong reduction of the State sector (6% in 8 years). Economists say that in order to ensure that State enterprises can be profit-making, their workforce should be reduced by from 30% to 40% and the redundancies can be transferred to other economic sectors. The number of unemployed workers, following the staff reduction in State enterprises in the period 1986-1990 has increased since the return of those who worked in the former socialist countries and in the Middle East (30% of the guest workers were women and 40% former State workers and employees).²

From January 1991 to January 1992, 82,757 workers of State enterprises (60% of them being women) lost their jobs.³

In 1993 the workers of the State sector accounted only for 9.1% of the total number of working people, while the percentage in non-State sectors increased to 90.9% (See Table 16).

Particularly, the percentage of female workers in the State sector decreased from 48.56% in 1991 to 47% in 1996 whereas the percentage of female workers in non-State sectors increased from 46.6% in 1991 to 51.54% in 1996.

The staff reduction made in State enterprises and organs threatened the employment of both men and women. But *women encountered more difficulties and unfavorable conditions than men*. They can hardly have the same physical strength and abilities as men. There may be women who are equal with men in these regards. But the habit of respecting men and looking down on women leads to underestimating their value. Besides, the utilization of female workers requires more spending on social welfare for

1. Report "Actual State of Female Workers in the Informal Sector" by the Vietnamese General Confederation of Labour, Trade Unions University, 1997.

2. Op. cit.

3. *Statistical Data on Labour and Employment*. Statistical Publishing House, 1993.

them than for male workers (on average 15% higher). These are causes for employers to dismiss female workers or to limit the number of female workers when they recruit labor force. This unjust treatment is being applied to all strata of working women, including middle-aged women who are employed by enterprises, and young women who are seeking jobs.

In general, enterprises' owners are reluctant to employ female workers as they have to implement State regulations on maternity leave, mother's leave to care for sick children and so on. Thus the Textile and Garment Company 29 March has 1,240 female workers. Of them 620 have already got married, 490 are nursing their small babies. There are cases when 40 female workers take leave on the same day and the company must keep paying their salaries. The Garment Company Victory spend every year more than VND 400 million, (23% of its profits), on the implementation of the regulations concerning women's rights and interests.

Therefore, a number of companies strive to take the maximum advantage of female workforce. The Minh Hoàng Company Ltd in Bình Chánh, Hồ Chí Minh City, has more than 1,000 female workers. In 1997, the income of each of them was only VND 300,000 per month. But they had to work regularly 12-14 hours a day.

In the Thịnh Phát Wool Company (in Thủ Đức), in July 1997, more than 100 workers had to work in increased shifts. Sometimes they had to work 20 hours a day, but they received an advance of only VND 100,000 per head at the beginning of July 1997.¹

In the 1990-1995 period, a great number of women had to change their occupations.

The survey of 300 women living in the inner part of Hanoi carried out in 1996, shows that 66% of the interviewees changed their occupations at least once.

Among them, 31.3% left their jobs due to staff reduction in their enterprises, 22.6% due to lack of working capacity, 30.43% of their own

1. *Women of Vietnam Review*, 29 December 1997.

free will, 3.48% due to change of products, 5.52% due to the necessity to be retrained.¹

Noteworthy is the fact that the percentage of *women who left their working place of their own free will* is almost the same as that of *women who left their jobs due to staff reduction*. These women want to find better occupations, which can bring about higher incomes for them. Particularly during the period 1992-1995, many female teachers of different levels, mostly those of the first and second levels of general education left their job to practise other occupations, because their salaries as teachers were not enough for their living.

A number of women, who had graduated from various universities (including foreign universities) also leave temporarily the occupations, and professions in which they have been trained in order to do other jobs. This phenomenon can be explained by the fact that nowadays a number of companies (Vietnamese, foreign, or joint ventures) are ready to employ young women with good knowledge of the profession, of foreign languages and computer using, and ready to offer them high salaries.

Women who face difficulties in searching for jobs are often those with low educational and professional levels; they know no foreign languages, or are in poor health condition and thus not able to meet the requirements of the market.

On the other hand, *in a number of occupations, women prove to have more strong points than men*. For instance, in the economic branches which require patience, prudence, diligence, dexterity, good eyesight, etc. (garment industry, education, services, tourist guiding, finance, banking). In those industries and branches, enterprises' owners are likely to prefer women to men, for the sake of their profits.

Considering the *pay for wage-earners*, we see that on an average, women only receive 72% of the pay for men.

1. Result of the research project carried out by candidate doctor Đặng Kim Nhung, National Economics University: "Changes in the role of women living in the inner part of Hanoi under the effect of industrialization in the conditions of the market economy."

The surveys carried out in State enterprises in April 1994 gave the following data:

- on average, each worker earns VND 235,000 per month;
- during the period 1991-1993 period, the average salary of urban women was VND 174,000 per month; while that of urban men was VND 252,000;
- In rural areas, the average income of a woman is VND 68,000 while that of men was VND 98,000 (See Table 17 and Table 18).

Table 17: Average monthly salary by area and educational level, 1992-1993 (VND 1,000)

Graduation diploma	Urban area		Rural area	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
General average	174	252	68	98
Having no diploma	142	218	61	101
First level (general education)	172	273	66	94
Second level (general education)	188	208	51	90
Third level (general education)	176	265	105	92
Technical worker	138	219	60	90
Secondary vocational school	163	270	105	157
College	247	343	137	131
University		451		161
Post-University		326		

Source: *Surveys of the Living Standards of Vietnamese 1992-93*. General Statistical Bureau, 1994.

Table 18: Average monthly salary in a number of economic branches in 1993 (VND 1,000)

	General	Female	% in comparison with the general salary
Agriculture and foodstuffs industry	239	199.6	83
Heavy industry	262	250	95
Light industry	280	260	92
Forestry	229.7	191.8	83
Education and training	369.7	294	79
Medical services	296.4	267	90
Banking	282.2	270	95

Source: *Vietnamese Female Workers*, 1993. Women's Publishing House, 1995.

Considering the highest educational level attained, we see that both in urban and rural areas, at all levels *the salary of women is lower than that of men*. For instance, in urban areas, the average monthly salary of a female worker without graduation diplomas is VND 142,000 while that of a male worker without graduation diplomas is VND 218,000. In rural areas, the average monthly salary of a female worker of the same category is VND 61,000 while that of a man is VND 101,000. The salary of an urban female technical worker is VND 138,000; that of a male worker is VND 219,000. In rural areas, the salary of a female worker is VND 60,000, and that of a male worker, VND 90,000. In urban areas, the salary of a female worker graduated from secondary vocational school is VND 163,000 and that of male worker of the same category is VND 270,000. (Surveys carried out in 1992-1993; See Table 17). If we take the various economic branches for consideration, we can see that in agriculture and the foodstuffs industry, the salary of women accounts for only 83% of the general average salary; in education and training services, this percentage is 79%; in the light industry: 92%; in health care services: 90%; and in banking: 95% (See Table 18).

In almost all economic branches, the average salary of women is lower than that of men.

In agriculture, the average salary of female workers accounts only for 62% of that of male workers.¹

This reality reflects the total factors related to the differences between men and women in the selection of professions for training, working ability, and places of work. It also reflects the unfair evaluation, or under-estimation of the productivity and effectiveness of female labour.

Women have less opportunities and conditions for selection of trades and participation in vocational training courses than men. They can hardly select the occupations they like, which can ensure for them good working

1. *Vietnam through the Gender Prism*; p. 57.

conditions and high pay. When doing their jobs, women can hardly take part in training courses to improve their skills due to the heavy burden they have to shoulder in work and in the family. Even when they are eager to acquire more knowledge to raise their professional standard, they are likely to be prevented from doing so. This reality hinders the advancement of women in their career. Women have the tendency and they are forced to do so - to choose jobs near their home and jobs not requiring long absence, or long stay far from their family (particularly married women or mothers of many children). They do so in order to balance the time for work and for family affairs. In this case, they may have to accept hard and low-paid jobs. The fact that women's salaries are lower than men's are conditioned by the former's lower educational and professional standards, their lack of experiences and resourcefulness in business management due to lack of training. The causes also include the under evaluation of women's efforts and the quality and productivity of their labour by enterprises' leaders or owners, who still have the habit of respecting men and despising women. Then women suffer from this prejudice, especially in the professions whose results cannot be measured in a very concrete way.

Workers' salary in fact is linked with their *working conditions*, the policies of medical insurance and social insurance designed to ensure their health and lasting life.

Vietnam's Labour Code has a chapter underlining the specific regulations concerning female workers, including maternity leave, mother's leave to take care of sick children, the flexible time table of women who can be allowed to work only a number of hours each day, a number of days each week; the prohibition on discrimination against women in employment, the list of professions in which the use of female workers is prohibited, since they are harmful to the latter's health.

However, we find that those State policies and regulations are well implemented only in enterprises where there are strong trade union organizations, active in the protection of workers' interests. These enterprises and organs pay for the medical insurance for their workers and employees,

so that the latter are exempted from hospital fees, or can enjoy reduction of expenses for medical examinations and treatment. A number of organs and enterprises pay for social insurance for their workers and employees (there are cases where social insurance is paid partly by the enterprise and partly by the worker). Workers who suffer accidents or bad luck can receive subsidies. But in fact, the various articles of the Labour Code are being implemented at different levels depending on the situation, the economic capability of each enterprise or organ, in the State as well as the private sectors.

For instance, the garment, textile, or leather industries which involve a great number of female workers, are hard and require not only good eyesight and dexterity, but also a high labour intensity. Everyday, female workers have to cover a distance of from 10 to 15 kilometres to control the operation of machines. The working environment is not yet ensured properly. The regulations on lighting, temperature in the working place, the proportion of dust, the degree of noise, etc. are not yet taken into consideration in an adequate manner. Therefore, many professional diseases develop, badly impacting the health of female workers; in some cases the articles of the Labour Code may be seriously violated.

On the other hand, the advantages of the current labour policy for women have the effect of limiting the number of women participating in enterprises. Employers often contemplate only immediate economic gains but not long-lasting social effects, and they do not always want to have many female workers in the staff of their enterprises.

Many State macroscopic policies have not yet been implemented due to lack of timely guidance and regulations. For instance, the reduction of taxes, or exemption from taxation for enterprises using a great number of female workers, or the move of a number of expenses on social welfare related to women to the State budget so that the enterprise using female workers can bear no burden of those expenditures.

For State female workers and employees, the pension regime still contains irrationalities. Female workers in production lines lose strength

quickly and wish to retire on a pension prematurely (after 20 or 25 years of labour), without having to be categorized as leaving jobs "because of poor health". While female workers in administrative organs, educational, medical and scientific branches request the right to retire on a pension at the age of 60 like men. At present, female workers retire at the age of 55, 5 years earlier than men, and this practice is influencing badly the promotion of women to leading positions. Many women having the same abilities as men have to retire at the age of 55, while men of the same age may be promoted to higher positions. The salary of retired women, who have to leave jobs 5 years earlier than men, is lower than that of retired men.

Vietnam's Labour Code underlines the principle of gender equality in employment and salary. But in reality, female workers are still suffering many disadvantages even in State enterprises and agencies.

In fact, the Labour Code points out the fundamental principles to protect the interests of workers in general and female workers in particular. But many concrete regulations in sub-law documents suitable for each occupation, are needed to be put into practice to become useful to workers.

There is now a list of occupations in which the utilization of female workers is forbidden because those occupations are considered harmful to women's health. But even this list should be reviewed in conformity with the present developments of the scientific and technological revolution, many of those occupations are no more strenuous or harmful to workers' health and it would be very good for women to practice them. The list of forbidden occupations, if not reviewed and improved, may cause disadvantages for women, limiting their participation in suitable occupations and preventing the development of their abilities.

4. Female workers in the non-State and informal economic sectors

Economic sectors in Vietnam are divided into State and non-State categories. We can also distinguish the formal sector (including State and non-State enterprises) and the informal sector or unofficial sector.

The *informal economic sector* includes small businesses, with small capital, small-sized production scope, with mainly manual work which produce a small amount of products, have or have not fixed places of work; their workers have received not any training or very little training. The production activities of this sector are highly flexible. They can change from one form to another easily. The owners of this category of enterprises are mainly self-employed, using the workforce of their families, or hiring some workers. Their activities are not registered with the State; they do not have to pay taxes, except only some fees for the local administration.

The following jobs are often classified in the informal economic sector: selling vegetables, foodstuffs, fruits, flowers on the streets or in markets; selling old clothes, sundries, newspapers and books, cigarettes, lotteries, ornamental plants on the streets; collecting disposed materials, serving in small restaurants and tea-rooms, transporting travelers on motorcycles or trishaws; repairing bicycles, keeping vehicles, taking photographs, doing housework for families, caring for small children, making products at home according to the order of enterprises, etc.

So the informal sector includes activities of production, business, services, work for wages, and the household economy.

In the process of Renovation, many State enterprises are being reorganized. Investments have been made in the improvement of their appliances and technologies. Those enterprises recruit mainly workers with robust health, rather high professional and educational standards (senior secondary education upwards). Many unemployed female workers fail to meet those requirements. In general, the educational standard of Vietnamese women is not low in comparison with women of other developing countries, but their professional standard is very low. In 1989, 93% of the women aged 15 and older had no professional diplomas (See Table 19).

Table 19: Professional standard of the population aged 15 upwards by sex in 1989 (%)

Professional standard	Male (%)	Female (%)	General (%)
- No professional or technical standard	88.1	93.3	90.9
- Technical workers with diplomas	3.7	0.9	2.3
- Technical workers without diplomas	2.6	1.2	1.8
- Secondary level	3.1	3.3	3.2
- College, University level	2.5	1.9	1.3

Source: Data on Vietnamese Women, from 1985 to 1995.

Table 20: Population 13 years of age and older; classified by sex and professional-technical standard

Total population 13 years of age and upward	Professional - Technical standard															
	No standard	Technicians, employees having certificates	Professional secondary education	College education	University education	Master's degree	Doctor's degree (1 st grade)	Doctor's degree (2 nd grade)	Undergraduate							
54,473,812 persons	50,330,392	1,239,835	1,526,248	379,232	936,853	17,244	8,836	2,489	26,600							
% in comparison with population 13-year-old	92.40%	2.27%	2.80%	0.69%	1.716%	0.031%	0.016%	0.0045%	0.04%							
% male/female	Male 47.20	Female 52.80	Male 73.16	Female 26.84	Male 46.70	Female 55.30	Male 39.0	Female 61.00	Male 66.00	Female 34.00	Male 70.39	Female 69.61	Male 79.65	Female 21.35	Male 96.30	Female 3.70

Source: 1999 Population and Housing Census.

The development of the non-State economic sector, especially the informal sector has created jobs for millions of workers.

4.1. The development of non-State enterprises and the participation of female workers

Before 1986, non-State enterprises in general, private and individual enterprises in particular were not encouraged and operated only moderately. Since the adoption of the Resolutions of the 16th Plenum of Vietnamese Communist Party's Central Committee (6th tenure), activities of private, individual enterprises have been officially encouraged and

supported. Conditions have been created for the development of the private economic sector, with no limitation on the scale, position and occupation.

According to the *Statistical Yearbook of 1993*, up to August 1993, there were 6,728 private enterprises, 2,750 limited companies, and 92 stock companies. The total of 9,389 enterprises attracted nearly half a million workers. In 1990 there were only 770 private enterprises, with 100,000 workers. In December 1993, the figures were brought up to 8,334 private enterprises, 3,287 limited companies, and 117 stock companies, with a total capital of VND 3,979 billion. By the end of 1994, the number of private enterprises was 12,190, an increase of 4% against December 1993. In December 1995, there were 17,000 private enterprises.¹

The enterprises in industry, handicraft, commerce, services, tourism, transport, and construction attracted 3.5 million workers, accounting for 11% of the social workforce.²

The value of industrial production created by those enterprises in 1993 was VND 5,818 billion accounting for 11.7% of the total industrial production value of the country, and 59% of the local industrial production value. According to the *Nhân Dân* newspaper published on 30 October 1997, there were at the time 25,000 stock companies, private enterprises, and cooperatives, 1.5 million households doing individual business.

They had a total capital of VND 30,000 billion and employed 5 million workers.

The surveys carried out in 1991 in Hanoi, Hải Phòng and Hồ Chí Minh City show that on an average each enterprise created jobs for 15.51 people, among them women accounted for 32.7%.

1. Data are supplied by Hoàng Kim Giao, Scientific Research Centre on Female Workers: *Report on the Employment of Women in Big Cities through the Development of Non-State Enterprises*.

2. Op. cit.

Those enterprises often used manual labour, combined with mechanized and half-mechanized instruments. They attracted workers having moderate educational, professional and technical standards, and women (especially young women) had many opportunities to participate in those enterprises. Among female workers of those enterprises, 31.4% were members of the owners' family and 68.4% were hired workers.

In private enterprises, hired workers accounted for 62.5%; in production groups: 88.2%; in the household economy female hired workers accounted only for 17.6%.

According to the surveys carried out in 1993, on average each enterprise created jobs for 63 workers, among them female workers accounted for 48.6%.

In comparison with 1991, the number of workers in non-State enterprises increased by 4.62 times; the average number of female workers in each enterprise increased by 15.9%.¹

So, from 1991 to 1993, *the number of female workers in non-State enterprises increased very quickly*, and the percentage of female workers become almost the same as that of male workers. Notable is the fact that a number of State workers and employees also participate in the non-State sector. Women usually work extra hours for non-State enterprises to increase their incomes.

Women of different ages participate also in services to help private enterprises such as material supply, home production of secondary products, work as agents for selling consumer goods, and other services. In fact about 30% of the amount of the above work are being carried out by women working out of enterprises. On average, every 10 workers having permanent jobs in enterprises are helped by two people who work out of the enterprises to participate in the process of production and business. The surveys carried out in December 1993 show that 56.4% of the

1. Data supplied by Hoàng Kim Giao, Scientific Research Centre on Female Workers.

surveyed 291 households having economic activities worked as satellites for non-State enterprises, mainly in the textile, garment, knitting industries, and 95.5% of workers were women.¹

Here we should distinguish two different groups:

1) Group of *hired workers*, carrying out activities for private enterprises, production groups and families, in order to earn wages;

2) Group of small- and medium-sized *enterprises' owners*, and managers of the household economy.

Hired female workers in non-State enterprises:

In 1990, on average, the salary of female workers accounted only for 76.6% of that of male workers. The majority of women worked in service branches; they had a low skill level, and occupied lower positions than men. According to the surveys carried out in 1993, high-skilled workers earned monthly VND 375,300, a sum of money 1.67 times greater than the salary of ordinary workers. High-skilled workers accounted only for 30% of the total number of enterprises' workers, and the percentage of women among high-skilled workers was 20-22%.²

Social welfare:

In the non-State sector, the implementation of State regulations on social welfare is not ensured properly, depending on the financial ability and concern of each enterprise's owner. In some cases, there are agreements signed by the employer and the hired worker, defining the working time, salary and working conditions. But in a majority of cases, there are only verbal agreements between them on the contents of work and the salary. Therefore, the policies concerning female workers such as paid maternity leave, leave due to sickness, annual home leave, etc. are rarely

1. Report by Hoàng Kim Giao.

2. Report by Hoàng Kim Giao.

implemented. Trade unions are not active in defending the workers' interests. In many enterprises, such an organization is still absent. In general, cooperatives are implementing social welfare regulations better (See Table 21) while very few private enterprises and households adhere to those regulations.

Less than one-third of private enterprises and production groups apply the regime of paid leave for sickness.

Paid maternity leave for female workers is applied by less than 10% of private enterprises and production groups.

This is a clear violation of the Labour Code and results in great losses for working women.

For fear of losing jobs, female workers in those enterprises have to accept this situation. Apparently trade unions, women's unions and other mass organizations, as well State organs should intervene to improve the situation.

Table 21: Non-State Enterprises and Social, Welfare Insurance (%)

	Household	Private enterprise	Production group	Cooperative	General
Paid leave for sickness	7.4	30.3	32.7	59.8	37.5
Paid maternity leave	3.7	7.6	13.1	59.8	23.1
Unpaid maternity leave	3.7	11.8	16.9	23.5	15.9
Paid annual home leave	3.7	18.5	11.2	38	20.5

Source: *Surveys in Hanoi, Hải Phòng, Hồ Chí Minh City in 1991*, by the Institute of Science on Labour, under the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs.

Many non-State enterprises do not have *stable jobs*. The enterprises' owners can at any time, discharge workers, especially when they suffer losses or change the production process, or products. In those cases, women turn out to be in weaker positions and are likely to suffer the most disadvantages.

Over the past years, *medical insurance and social insurance* have almost not been implemented in non-State enterprises. The State has not yet a compulsory policy on this matter, while enterprises' owners only think of their immediate interests, and workers, who compete with each other on the labour market, are ready to accept jobs without such kinds of insurance.

4.2. Female workers in the informal economic sector and household economy in urban areas

Women account for 70% of the total number of workers in this sector. They sell vegetables, food, foodstuff, fruits, flowers, trifling things on the streets and in markets, collect wasted materials, old newspapers and books and do different kinds of services. Since the new policy of the State was promulgated, the informal economic sector has developed boisterously. Playing an important role in the Vietnamese economy, the informal sector contributes 53.8% of the GDP and *creates jobs for 20 million workers* (nearly half of the total workforce), or 54% of the workers in non-State sectors.

This is the consequence of the urgent need of the population to have jobs and to earn incomes, with only small capital and little professional training. This sector brings about only small incomes, but it is very easy for women to change occupations and in general the occupations *are suitable for women*.

At the same time, the development of many different trades and professions in the informal sector can meet in time the needs of consumers, especially in urban areas. In 1992 female workers accounted for 74.54% of traders, 41.27% of artisans (70.2% of tailors) 74.9% of service workers (92.3% of hairdressers, 73.15% of waiters, 70.68% of house maids)¹.

Many women who have jobs in the formal economic sector, but have small incomes work overtime in some occupations of the informal sector.

1. Data supplied by the General Statistical Bureau.

Many occupations of the informal sector are serving actively those of the formal sector, for instance collecting wasted materials, old books and newspapers, repairing vehicles, selling petrol and oil. During the surveys of 1,300 people in 7 cities and provinces on the causes pushing them to move to the informal sector, 51.5% of them point out the difficult economic situation of their family; 33.4% say that this is because they cannot find jobs in other economic sectors; 18.2% answer that they move to the informal sector because they want to search for jobs for their family members.¹

Regarding the age of the people working in the informal sector, they are aged mainly between 25 and 39, married and having one, two or three children. When they go to work, the children stay at home with their elder siblings.

Regarding their *family relations*, many women come from rural areas to cities to do business. So they entrust their husband or their husband's parents with the management of family affairs. Under the impact of the Renovation process, people are ready to leave their family for earning their living in other far-flung areas.

Due to poverty, they have to search for the most effective solutions to getting high incomes and experience some temporarily "partition" with their family.

Women in the informal sector in urban areas are very busy with production and business activities. But they earn rather high incomes and therefore their family members are ready to help them in family affairs.

When inquired about the situation of their family, 85.4% (of the 1,255 interviewed people) say that they are esteemed by their parents, husbands and children.² It is their effective activities in earning incomes for the

1. *Report on the Situation of Female Workers in the Informal Economic Sector in Vietnam*. Trade Union University.

2. Op. Cit.

family and their proper attitudes towards their relatives that account for this esteem.

Regarding the *diversified range of occupations* in the informal economic sector, women are engaged in many different occupations. An interview with 1,469 women in eight provinces and cities shows that they are doing 300 different kinds of jobs. The majority are selling foodstuffs, candies, sundries, food and beverages. A small number of the women are selling electrical goods or building materials. The number of women participating directly in production such as processing food and foodstuffs, manufacturing textiles and garments, pharmaceutical materials account for only a small percentage. Besides the women are also doing a number of other miscellaneous jobs.

In general, in the informal sector, the *educational and professional levels* of female workers are not high. In the northern part of the country most female workers in the informal sector have finished the second level; a small number of them have the first level certificates. In the South, a high percentage of female workers in the informal sector have finished the first level of education (from the 1st form to the 5th form).

It is clear that women of different educational levels (even graduates from the first level) may become sources of female workforce in the informal economic sector.

Regarding the professional level, 74.5% of the interviewed women say that they have not yet received any training; as for the rest, 8.3% have finished the primary level, 13.3% the secondary level, 3.6% the graduate and post-graduate levels. Women with rather high professional levels are usually concentrated in services and business. Among female artisans, a small number have received vocational training. But there are women who have to practise occupations other than those in which they have been trained. (See Table 22)

Table 22: Jobs and vocational training (Informal Sector)

% by row, % by column	With vocational training	Without vocational training	Total by row
Small industry and handicraft	31.4	68.6	188
	28.6	11.6	14.3
Business	5.3	94.7	514
	13.1	43.8	39
Services	23.5	76.5	358
	40.8	24.6	27.2
Household economy	20.3	79.7	69
	6.8	4.9	5.2
Work for wages	11.9	88.1	134
	1.8	10.6	10.2
Other jobs	10.9	89.1	55
	2.9	4.4	4.2
Total by column	206	1112	1318
	15.6	84.4	100%

Source: Survey conducted by Trade Union University in the framework of the Project "Situation of female workers in the informal economic sector in Vietnam", 1997.

The factor pushing the majority of unemployed women to the informal economic sector is that many occupations in this sector do not require vocational training or require only little vocational training, with small investments.

In general, women organize by themselves production and business on a small scale, with small investments which can be recovered quickly. They are mostly self-employed workers and are assisted by the members of their family, including children and old parents. Besides, a number of women hire some workers from time to time or on regular basis.

A characteristic of the informal sector is that the procedures are simple: permission to practise occupations in this sector can be obtained easily or it is not necessary to obtain permission from the State in case small-scaled production is organized at people's home or the person concerned does small-scaled commerce in markets, on the streets, etc. He does not have to pay fees or pays only small fees for the local administration. Places for production and business are easy to find. In many cases women use their own houses or they work on the streets. The number of products also

varies according to the extent of consumption recorded each day or each month. The women can easily change from one occupation to another and carry out simultaneously their business and take care of their family, especially their children.

In the informal sector, there are two groups:

+ Group of hired female workers, and

+ Group of women who organize by themselves production or business on the household scale or to some greater extent (linked with the group of female entrepreneurs in charge of small or medium-sized enterprises).

Table 23: Places of production and business

Number % by row % by column	Of one's own	Of one's family	Hired place	Total by row
Overlooking a street Overlooking a road	204 34.2	254 42.5	139 23.3	597 56.1
	64.2	77.2	33.3	
Stalls, kiosks in the market	24.4 35.8	16 22.8	59.6 66.7	43.9

Source: Surveys by Trade Union University, in the research project: "Situation of female workers in the informal economic sector in Vietnam, 1997."

Table 24: Difficulties in production and business

	Number of filled questionnaires	Answers %	Cases %
- Difficulties due to lack of capital	695	56.7	79.7
- Difficulties due to lack of means of production	85	6.9	9.7
- Difficulties due to lack of conditions for production or lack of stands for goods	316	25.8	36.2
- Other difficulties	130	10.6	14.9
Total of people who have given answers	1,226	100%	140.6

Source: Surveys by Trade Union University, in the research project: "Situation of female workers in the informal economic sector in Vietnam, 1997."

a) Hired female workers

In the informal economic sector, the majority of the wage-earning women are being hired by households involved in small industry, handicraft, services and commerce. Very few of them are serving the household economy. The work in the informal sector is characterized by simplicity, which is done by 75.5% of the total number of people interviewed. Ranking second are small industry and handicraft; and third are services (See Table 25 and Table 26)

Table 25: Workers hired by kind of jobs

Number % by row	1-2 workers	3-4 workers	5-6 workers	7 workers upwards	Total by row
Small industry, handicraft	19 29.2	16 24.6	10 15.4	20 30.8	65 45.5
Business	10 43.5	4 17.4	5 21.7	4 17.4	23 16.1
Services	19 72.5	7 17.5	1 4.5	3 7.5	40 28
Household economy	4 44.4	2 22.2	2 22.2	1 11.1	9 6.3
Other crafts	50 65	16.7 30	18	33.3 30	
Total by column	45.5	21	12.6	21	

Source: Surveys by Trade Union University in the research project: "Situation of female workers in the informal economic sector in Vietnam, 1997."

Table 26: Jobs being done (in the total number of hired workers)

Kind of jobs	Number of cases	% of the total number
Small industry, handicraft	22	11.5
Business	5	2.6
Services	12	6.3
Household economy	1	0.5
Simple crafts	145	75.5
Other crafts	6	3.1
No information	1	0.5
Total	192	100

Source: Surveys by Trade Union University in the research project: "Situation of female workers in the informal economic sector in Vietnam, 1997."

The educational standard of hired workers is, in general, at the primary level.

Regarding the *working hours*, 42.7% of women work from 5 to 8 hours a day; 42.2% from 9 to 12 hours a day; a small number of women work less than 4 hours or more than 12 hours a day.

The women working in small industry and handicraft often work from 5 to 8 hours a day. But they do simple and hard work bringing about low salary.

Regarding *salary*, the average monthly salary is VND 345,000. The majority of women earn every month from VND 200,000 to VND 400,000. The salary depends in part on the worker's level of skill and in a great part on the number of working hours and the kind of jobs.

Regarding the *attitude of enterprises' owners* towards hired workers, most female workers say that the owners have a good attitude (54.7% of the interviewed women). The majority of hired workers are satisfied with their relations with the employers. They usually do simple jobs which do not require high skills and therefore they accept a low salary. If their working hours increase, they are paid more. As many of them have not enough jobs, they volunteer to do extra jobs at the request of the employer.

However *medical welfare and social welfare* are not ensured for female workers of the informal economic sector. Welfare depends on the good will of enterprises' owners and on the "sentimental relations" between the employer and hired workers. If these relations are good, the employer is ready to help the worker in case of illness or family misfortune. The haphazard, lax, familiar character is characteristic for the employer-employee relations in the informal sector, relations that are not clearly defined by official labour contracts.

b) Self-employed workers

For people who organized by themselves production and business, the problem of *working place* is the first important precondition for doing

business in a stable and effective way. As we see in Table 23, working places are those overlooking streets, roads, stalls, and kiosks in markets. Those places are considered the most favorable for trading and services. In general 70% of enterprises have stable working places. They hire premises (one-third of cases), use their relatives' places (one-third of cases) or in fewer cases, they use their own places (See Table 23).

Other people do not have stable working places, although they try hard to "stretch" to the places overlooking streets and roads, or compete with each other to get a tiny place which is favorable for their business in markets. Many women have to sell goods on the streets, going from door to door, or hiring a small place on the pavement, in front of other people's shops. Their business areas are small, often under six square metres and change quickly.

Between 60% and 70% of entrepreneurs in this economic sector pay taxes: of less than VND 80,000 per month (50%), of less than VND 50,000 per month (23.5%), and VND 500,000 per month (16.7%), and VND 1 million (5.2%).¹

Most people who do business and production are *self-employed*. In many cases, all members of their family, including children and old parents are also involved. In a number of cases, they hire some workers. Nearly 50% of those entrepreneurs hire only one or two workers (See Table 25).

In small industry and handicraft, entrepreneurs hire one or two workers, or they hire 6 to 7 workers or more.

In the service branch, entrepreneurs often hire one or two workers.

Regarding *difficulties* in production and business, 56.7% of entrepreneurs point out lack of capital, 25.8%: lack of suitable working places or stalls, 6.9%: lack of production means (See Table 24).

1. Surveys carried out by Trade Union University in the research project: "Situation of female workers in the informal economic sector in Vietnam, 1997."

So the most common and biggest difficulty for entrepreneurs is lack of capital.

When inquired about the *obstacles* they face in production and business, entrepreneurs quote two main obstacles: there are not yet rational policies and mechanisms; and environment is not favorable for their operations.

Regarding capital sources, 65% of entrepreneurs borrow money from private lenders; 25% from the State, more than 5% from programmes of hunger eradication and poverty alleviation, and the National Fund for job creation.

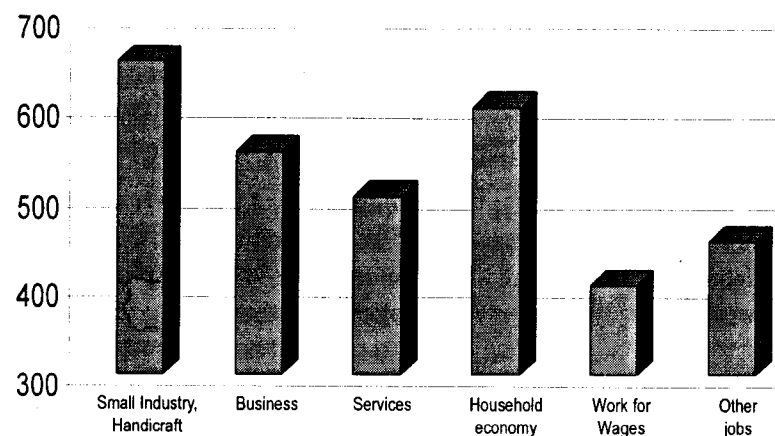
In general, entrepreneurs seek by themselves for capital for production and business, using their own funds (nearly 60%) and borrowings from their relatives and friends. The sums of money borrowed are in general small, borrowed in a short span of time, with an interest rate of 1.5 to 5%. In some cases, entrepreneurs need a big sum of money in a short span of time, and they have to accept an interest rate of 10%.

In the informal economic sector, in general, entrepreneurs do not have stable *incomes*. They often calculate their incomes per day. Thus, 45% of the interviewed people say that their average income per day is between VND 5,000 and 14,000; more than 27%: VND 15,000-24,000 per day; 20%: VND 25,000-40,000 per day.

Table 27 shows that entrepreneurs engaged in small industry and handicraft report the highest incomes, on average VND 635,000 per month; entrepreneurs in the household economy: VND 592,000; entrepreneurs doing business: VND 538,000; services: VND 532,000. Hired workers have the lowest incomes: VND 396,000 per month.

In fact, small industry, handicraft and the household economy bring rather high stable incomes.

Table 27: Average incomes of difficult kinds of jobs (VND 1,000)



Source: Report on the situation of female workers in the informal sector in Vietnam, 1997.

c) Female owners of private small and medium-sized enterprises

The female owners of private small- and medium-sized enterprises are found both in the informal sector and in the non-State sector.

They often do business with *capital bigger than that of women working in the informal sector* (selling trifling things in markets, or from door to door, etc). In general, they have fixed places for production and business. They have to obtain permission to carry out business, production, to pay taxes at the start of business; they need to have some skills and business management ability. At present, four-fifths of the total number of restaurants, shops, small enterprises producing garments, textiles and leather products are managed by women, as well as half of the total number of enterprises producing food, beverage and foodstuffs.¹

Enterprises managed by women are often of smaller scale, hiring fewer workers, bringing about less profits in comparison with enterprises

managed by men. In general, women dare not take risks. They like to do business with small capital, the money being turned over quickly and bringing about small but sure profits; the occupations require only little training so they are easy to be changed.

The surveys in urban areas in 1991 show that among the owners of private small-and medium-sized enterprises, 78% were men and 22% were women.

In rural areas, the percentages were 80% and 14% respectively.

Regarding the *educational level*, 53.6% of female entrepreneurs have no diplomas; 17.2% are graduates from the first level; 16.5% the second level, 3% the third level of general education; 3% of them are technical workers of primary level; 5.6% are of secondary professional level; 1.08% are of college and university level.

In general, the common educational standard of female entrepreneurs is the first level and second level.¹ The *difficulties and obstacles* female entrepreneurs are facing are as follows:

First, those difficulties and obstacles are related to the *role and position of women in the family*. To organize an enterprise, a woman must have the agreement and assistance of her husband. (76% of household heads are men). The burden of housework, especially childbirth, nursing small babies and illness, creates many obstacles for women, preventing them from concentrating efforts, time and intellect on their business. If the husband does not share the burden of work and help his wife, it is very difficult for the woman to succeed in her business.

Besides, women have to face many prejudices still common among their family members, relatives and friends. People often talk about the limitations of women in business management: low knowledge level, especially in new technical, technological branches, in occupations that

1. Report on employment through investigations into private entrepreneurs in Vietnam by Per Rona, ILO, 1993.

are not traditionally practised by women; weak organizational capacity; poor knowledge of laws and regulations concerning business management; greater difficulties for women to develop social relations, in comparison with men and many others.

Second, the obstacles are related to the low *educational, technical, professional and management levels of women*, which create difficulties for them in acquiring knowledge of laws and regulations related to the establishment of enterprises, in locating source of capital and materials, in organizing production, in finding markets for their products, in competing in the market, in using modern equipment and applying new techniques and technologies.

Women are *not yet familiar with leadership, management activities*, economic plans and arguments presentation. Due to limited social relations, women can acquire little social necessary information on the situation of business, prices, and customers' taste. Therefore, they face many obstacles in approaching capital and labour markets, as well as material sources. Especially, they encounter many difficulties in borrowing money.

Despite many obstacles and difficulties, female entrepreneurs always strive to make progress, and many of them have scored brilliant achievements. They well manage their business, learning and working at the same time, studying what is new to them, hiring people who know the trade, supervising and controlling the work properly. They are distinguished by a creative mind and boldness in work.

In Vietnam, the common view is that *women manage better than men small- and medium-sized enterprises*. They are economical, knowing how to reserve the main sums of money for production. They are near to the worker and understand the latter's psychology better than men. However, women have difficulties in managing big enterprises, because they receive less training than men in business management and accessing big markets.

Female entrepreneurs managing State and non-State small- and medium-sized enterprises should be assisted in acquiring capital, techniques, and in

skill improvement. But the most important thing for them is the *ability to direct production, to calculate and manage business*, ready to cope with unfavorable events that may occur in the market economy full of competition. It is not easy to have this capability and in order to acquire it, women should learn to train themselves, draw experiences from their work, strive to bring into play favorable factors and overcome difficulties, develop their initiative without depending on the help and support of other people.

As for the State, it should give assistance to the models of women doing well business. It should support the development of enterprises bringing about social welfare, meeting the needs of women and children, the need of the locality (concerning material sources and markets for products), help to create new occupations, new jobs for workers, pay attention to professional training, skills training for women, help women to improve their knowledge of business management, laws and regulations related to business, banking and credit, to get access to new technologies, material sources, markets for products and to updated economic information.

The support of the State's economic, social, and labour policies for female entrepreneurs is very important in this period of economic transition.

5. Female guest workers

Following are some points on the situation of Vietnamese female guest workers in other countries. This is a new way of creating jobs for unemployed people.

In 1970-80's, a number of Vietnamese young people, male and female, went to foreign countries to work, mainly to the (former) Soviet-Union and East European socialist countries. They enthusiastically worked and learnt at the same time. This fact was welcomed in Vietnam as the young workers in those friendly countries could receive good salaries and enjoy good treatment and sympathy and assistance of the local people.

After the collapse of the socialist bloc, those workers come home with some capital to organize production and business without facing difficulties. A number of them have stayed in the foreign countries, and engaged in commerce to earn their living. A small number of them have been officially registered and have settled definitely in Russia, Germany, Poland, etc.

Later, Vietnamese workers began to go to other countries such as Libya, Japan, Korea, Laos, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Hongkong, the Islands of Samoa, Cyprus, or Taipei.¹

In 1998, due to the impact of the financial crisis in Asia, the export of Vietnamese workers faced many difficulties. In 1998, 12,000 workers come to work in more than 30 countries and territories, among them women accounted for 30%, (about 3,000 women) who worked mainly in the textile and garment industry, cotton shoe production, electronic services, hostelry and services in families.²

In general, guest workers have received little training and have a low skill level. Therefore they have to accept simple manual jobs, which are strenuous and bring forth low incomes.

In early 1999, Vietnamese guest workers in Samoa, who suffered maltreatment and received wages lower than promised, staged protest against the employers. They went on strike and 15 of them were forced to end the labour contract and go home with no compensation. The IMS Company in Vietnam in charge of labour export has worked in an irresponsible way. IMS cadres failed to come to Samoa to make a thorough investigation into the situation and agreed to provide workers only through the Internet.

1. Document of the Vice-Director of the Training Centre for Workers Participating in International Cooperation, under the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs. *Women of Vietnam Review*, 12 July 1999.

2. Op. cit.

Back in Vietnam, those female workers have not yet received from the IMS company any compensations including job leaving subvention, medical insurance, social insurance benefits and air-ticket fees to Samoa. (in all about US\$ 4,500 per head). They continue their struggle to demand the IMS Company to pay due compensation for them.

At present, attention is being paid by Vietnam to the export of workers. In Instruction 41 CT/TW of 22 September 1998, the Vietnamese Communist Party Politburo pointed out: "The export of workers and experts is a socio-economic activity which contributes to developing human resources, creating jobs, increasing workers' incomes, improving their skill level, developing the foreign currency sources for the country, and strengthening the international relations between our country and other countries in the world."

The objectives set by Vietnam from now until the year 2005 is to export in the year 2000 about 5,000 Vietnamese workers, among them 1,500-2,000 will be females. Between 2001 and 2005, the figure will be 10,000-150,000 workers per year; among them women will account for 35%.¹

To fulfil this task, in the interest of the country and of the guest workers themselves, we should improve many important links in this process.

+ The contingent of female workers should be *trained to raise their skill level, command of foreign languages*, industrialized mode of work, so that they can grasp information on the duties and interests of the guest worker and of the foreign employer, the proper behavior in other countries to have good relations between employers and employees. Then in case of negative manifestation, female guest workers can know how to instigate public opinions, to make complaints publicly, to bring actions against the wrong-doer, and to protect their legitimate interests.

1. Document of the Vice-Director of the Training Centre for Workers Participating in International Cooperation, *Women of Vietnam Review*, 12 July 1999.

At the same time, conditions should be created for female workers to practise more occupations, not confined in those traditionally intended for women.

+ The State and Government agencies have the responsibility to sign *bilateral agreements* on the conditions of recruitment, immigration, employment, residence, and repatriation of guest workers, on the obligations of the employer using guest workers, the responsibility of contractors (like the IMS Company) and other related bodies and agencies. Each article of such an agreement should be clearly defined according to the law of each country.

+ Trade unions of guest workers and of enterprises' owners play an important role in building policies suitable for guest workers, in order to protect their rights and interests according to the International Conventions of ILO, No. 87/1948 and 98/1949. Those Conventions pay attention to special policies concerning female guest workers, particularly their *right to human dignity*, priorities on the working time, the reduction of productivity in comparison with that of social labour in general.

+ The Vietnamese State should have drastic measures and severe punishment in respect of those who use workers in an illegal way and the people who serve as intermediaries for them, waging a resolute struggle against the *illegal trading in guest workers*.

+ Female guest workers should receive *protection from the authorities of the country where they come to work* in case of misfortune, on-the-job accidents, illness or other troubles and plagues.

Together with the employer of guest workers, the administration should have measures to ensure for guest workers proper living conditions, labour safety, medical care, working time and wages as defined in the already signed contracts. Most important is the assurance of security, the protection of human rights, eliminating acts of discrimination against the nationality of the workers.

We hope that the above very important conditions will be soon realized so that female workers who go abroad in accordance with State programmes, workers who mostly are young, unmarried women, going far from home to earn their living in foreign countries, will receive fair treatment, have their rights, interests and dignity protected, fulfil their labour contracts, and return safe and sound to their homeland to build a new life.

III. FEMALE WORKERS IN AGRICULTURE AND RURAL AREAS IN THE PRESENT PERIOD OF RENOVATION

During the period 1996-2000, the Vietnamese State strove to carry out the programme of national industrialization and modernization, in which the all-round economic development of rural areas is considered a key point of decisive significance. The promotion of *all-round development of agriculture*, including cultivation and animal husbandry and the *renovation of the economic structure in rural areas* to comprise many non-agricultural occupations, exert a deep influence on the socio-economic situation of the country. It is closely linked with the mobilization and the rational utilization of human resources in rural areas, which account for 76% of the total population. The rational utilization of female workers is worthy of special attention.

1. The Land Law and development of the household economy in rural areas

Under the effect of the new land policy of the Vietnamese State, agricultural production not only ensures food for the people, but also provides surplus for export, in order to have means to import necessary industrial products. The recorded achievements have contributed to the stabilization of the living of the peasantry, the most numerous and poorest stratum of population in our country.

a) In Vietnam, land constitutes the whole people's property and is under the unified management of the State.

Since 1988, the Vietnamese State has entrusted peasant households with the right to use land for production on a long-term basis. In 1993, the National Assembly (9th tenure) adopted the Land Law legalizing and concretizing the right to use land of households and individuals. Article 3 of the Law stipulates, "Households and individuals entrusted by the State with the right to use land, can change, transfer, inherit and mortgage the land use right."

Article 20 points out, "The time limit for the allotment of land for growing yearly crops and for aquaculture is 20 years; for growing perennial trees is 50 years."

The State also allots land to households and individuals on a long-term basis for housing. At the same time, people have the right to rent land for the purpose of agricultural production, or practice of other occupations. Article 22 of the Law stipulates, "Organizations, households and individuals entrusted by the State with the right to use land for agricultural production, forestry, aquaculture and salt production shall not be subject to land rent; If they are allocated land by the State for other purposes, they shall pay the land rent."

The National Assembly (10th tenure), at its 4th session in 1998, amended the Land Law.

Article 229 clearly defines the cases in which the State collects land rent. More precisely, all economic sectors, households, and individuals needing land for production and business have to shift to the form of land rent, including cases of use of the 5% the social welfare fund of land in communes, precincts, towns, for the purpose of production and business.

So all *peasant households* using land should pay land rent, but the rent is very low. Other social strata hiring land for business must pay higher rents.



Mrs. Phạm Thị Nghè, 71 years old, from Quang Phú commune, Đồng Hới Town (Quảng Bình Province), has been working as a forester for 40 years. She attended the 9th National Emulation Congress in November 2000 as a heroine of labour.

Photo: Xuân Quyet, Vietnam News Agency

Land is allotted to households in accordance with the number of household members. People in the working age receive one part per head; women having the same part as men. Children under 13 years old receive one third of the part set for one head. Children from 13 to 15 years old, women aged 55 upwards, and men aged 60 upwards receive half the set part. As the retirement age of women is 5 years earlier than men, women prove to be disadvantaged in the distribution of land.

At the same time, married women usually come to live in their husband's house which may be located in other places rather than their native village. In this new settlement, the concerned cannot receive land for the second time, while the exchange of land between two villages is impossible. So she is likely to face more difficulties in production.

In general, women rarely stand as household representatives in the certificate of the right to use land, although the State requires that the names and signatures of both the husband and the wife to be present therein. This creates a loophole for the husband to decide on the use of land by himself without consulting his wife.

b) The State's *decision to entrust households with the right to use land on a long-term basis has pushed up the household economy* in the whole country. Old-type agricultural cooperatives have ceased their activities. In 1994, nearly 12 million households in rural areas were engaged in agriculture and non-agricultural occupations. The population now has many favorable conditions for developing production, provided there are capital, means of production and business management abilities.

The *dynamism* of economic activities is a marked factor which has sped up the rural society's rhythm of life over the past 10 years. Besides agriculture and forestry as main branches of production, many other occupations are being strongly developed: food and foodstuffs processing, handicraft, commerce, services, and construction. Each family takes the initiative in organizing production and consumption of its products, taking full advantage of its entire labour force composed of its members. The

family can easily change the kind of products it makes when necessary, and hires local workers. This form of business has many strong points: people create capital by themselves (the extent of capital depends on the capacity of each family), provide themselves with workers (family members or hired workers), with skill training (traditional occupations or trades learned from other families) and use mainly manual and half-mechanized means of production, with materials acquired on the spot at rational prices. Furthermore, they can sell their products right in the locality.

In recent years, the initiatives and efforts of the rural population have pushed up the rise of many different occupations, attracting a great number of unemployed people. The State always affirms the independence of households, encourages everybody to practise the occupations they know well, and make a fortune by legitimate labour.

The *structure of the rural society* is changing; different kinds of households have taken shape; a great proportion of households are still practising only agriculture; the percentage of households undertaking simultaneously agriculture and non-agricultural occupations is increasing. A small percentage of households is specialized in non-agricultural occupations; there are also households owning small- and medium-sized enterprises, and households hiring workers.

The surveys carried out in 1995 in Cát Quế commune (Hoài Đức district, Hà Tây province), a commune where the commodity economy and non-agricultural occupations have been developed, show that 30% of the households are doing only agriculture; 60% do simultaneously agriculture and non-agricultural occupations; 10% are specialized in non-agricultural occupations.¹

In the whole country, 80% of households are doing agriculture and forestry, only 6% are specialized in non-agricultural occupations.

1. Results of the surveys carried out by the Centre for Family and Women Studies in implementing the research project on "Production, Reproduction and Welfare of the Family". 1995-1997.

The development of the household economy and private small enterprises constitutes a basic direction for job generation for workers in rural areas at present; it is helpful to both sides: the people who have conditions to organize business, and the labourers who need employment.

Incomes of families are increasing; their basic living conditions have been improved obviously.

According to the interviews made with households in 1994 concerning the comparison of their living standards in 1994 and 1990, 65.57% of rural households affirmed that *they had a higher standard* in 1994; 30.81% said that there was little change; 7.68% thought that they encountered more difficulties in 1994. The incomes of households engaged at the same time in agriculture and non-agricultural occupations, and households specialized in non-agricultural occupations, are higher than the incomes of the households doing only agriculture. The income of the majority of the rural population has increased. But given the minimum need of 2,000 calories per day for each person, we find that 57% of the rural population still live in poverty.

In recent years, *the living standard of rural people has been raised*, especially in the Red River and the Mekong River Deltas. Many families have been able to repair their old houses and build new ones, larger and more solid (houses made of bricks, multi-storey houses), to purchase agricultural implements, utensils, clothes, radio, television sets, motorcycles. (See Table 29) However, in the whole country, *the population's living standard is still low*. For instance, the surveys carried out in 1994 show that out of the total number of 12,114,079 houses, only 11.9% are solid; 45.6% are half-solid; 42.5% are other kinds of houses; 48% of houses have no electricity; 28% of the population are provided with safe water and 15% of households have appropriate hygienic facilities.

c) The division of land into small plots is creating obstacles to the industrialization and modernization of agriculture and rural areas

Due to the relatively egalitarian distribution of land to households, which is based on the number of members and workers of each household,

in the whole country in 1998, there were 75 million plots of land belonging to nearly 12 million households. The area of each plot is on average under 200 square metres; in all communes there are plots of only 20 to 50 square metres. On average, each household in mountain and midland regions has from 10 to 20 plots of land; in the Delta region of North Vietnam and the coastal areas of Central Vietnam, the figure is between 5 and 10 plots; in the Eastern part of South Vietnam: 4 plots; in the Mekong River Delta: 3 plots; particularly in the former 4th Zone, there were households possessing up to 40 plots of land.¹

The division of land into small plots is creating obstacles to agricultural production planning and improvement of the quality of land. Farmers do not want to invest in small plots lying far from their home.

At present, *exchange of land allotments* in accordance with the agreements between families is taking place in many localities, helping each family with the concentration of lands.²

So, the process of *accumulation of land* is taking place, creating favorable conditions for the improvement of land, change of the structure of grown crops, shaping of special agricultural zones and agricultural farms, and for the mechanization of agriculture.

The accumulation of land in Vietnamese rural areas takes place in different ways: rich families buy back their lands once offered to the State or taken away during the land reform period; a number of well-heeled households buy lands from households suffering losses in business; other households can ask for more land than the set limit, which is taken from the fund of land reserves of the locality, and they volunteer to pay higher taxes. Many households, not succeeding in production during many years,

1. *Nhân Dân* daily, 20th October 1998.

2. *Nhân Dân* daily, 20th October 1998: The process of exchanging land has been completed in eight provinces in North Vietnam, including 54 districts and towns; 588 communes, precincts, towns. Through this practice, the number of plots has been reduced by 60%-70%, each household having from 2 to 5 plots, with an area of 600 to 1,000 square metres each.

cannot repay the sums of money borrowed and fail to pay taxes for the State three or four consecutive years, therefore, *a number of their land plots have been taken back* and transferred to the households who volunteer to pay higher tax rates. In many cases, 40% to 100% of the allotment has been taken back.

This phenomenon is noted in most provinces across the country. Since the State has not yet got suitable policies and mechanisms to limit the negative side of the problem, in many localities disputes or conflicts related to land have happened. Many poor households - among them a great number of households heads are women who have no husbands or whose husbands are absent, reduced to poverty with no land or too little land, had to leave their native villages and go elsewhere to find jobs.¹

d) Population growth and the serious lack of jobs in rural areas

The Vietnamese population is increasing unceasingly although the State and society have made many efforts to reduce the birth rate. In 1993 the population growth rate was 2.1%. Meanwhile the area of cultivated land has been reduced so far due to the construction of roads, houses, industrial enterprises. The per head area of cultivated land is becoming smaller and smaller. In 1996-1997 it was only 0.03 to 0.06 hectare. On average, each household had 0.3 hectare of land. In Mỹ Sở commune, Châu Giang district, Hưng Yên province, the average was 310 square metres per head.

Every year, farmers produce two rice crops, and one crop of other cereals. Besides, they practise animal husbandry. However, they still earn not enough for their living, and they have to search for other jobs to increase their incomes. *They are not totally unemployed but suffer job shortage*. This situation is particularly serious in the Red River Delta (every year the local farmers are unoccupied during 4 or 5 months).

1. According to the surveys carried out in 1994 by the General Statistical Bureau, in the Mekong River Delta, 12,250 households (0.7%) had no land, and 108,035 households did not have enough land for production. In 1997 the figures increased to 136,338 households (5.7%) and 208,322 households respectively. *Women of Vietnam Review*, 12 April, 1999.

Therefore rural people migrate to cities, and develop economic areas to find jobs. Most of them are young and middle-aged men. A number of young women come also to cities to do services, petty trades, etc. Together with the development of many new occupations, the need for workforce increases quickly in urban areas, while rural workers are free to move to their new places of work. They may be temporarily registered in cities, but retain their names in the official household register of their family and they continue to state that they are agricultural workers. It is very difficult to define the exact number of people migrating to cities, because this number changes continuously.

Notable is the *spontaneous migration* of the ethnic minority people from the Northern mountainous areas to the Central Highlands, or from poor localities in Central Vietnam to wealthier areas in South Vietnam. In many cases, the whole family, the whole village, or the whole family lineage go to settle in the new region. There, they reorganize their villages, family lineages and often retain the names of their native villages and communes.

The differentiation between rich and poor households is more and more visible in rural areas. In fact, the new economic management mechanism has different effects on different families, those who have conditions to develop business, and those who are poor and have little expertise in business management.

The interviews made in 1994 with rural households on the causes of poverty give the following results:

- 47.74% of the households say that the cause of their poverty is that they have no land, or have not enough land for production;
- 78.88% say that the cause is the lack of capital and means of production;
- 23.72% say that the cause is the lack of labour force; and
- 32.34% point out the lack of experience in production and lack of business management abilities. (See Table 31).



Garden coffee trees of the Ragao people in the resettled village of Ia Yang Long, Đaklak Province.

Photo: Đình Na, Vietnam News Agency

The comparison of the average incomes of 20% of the richest households and the average income of 20% of the poorest households shows that the gap between these two groups in 1994 was 6.48 times, but it increased to 7.31 times in 1996.

The comparison of the average incomes of 5% of the richest households and 5% of the poorest households shows a gap of 20 times.¹

Vietnamese agriculture is marked by a *very high percentage of self-sufficient production* whereas the percentage of commodity production is very low. In the whole country from 50% to 60% of farmers provide themselves with all foods; in many localities the figure is 70% or 80%. The fact that farmers may sell a number of agricultural products to buy some consumer goods cannot be regarded as manifestation of commodity production, it is only a form of primitive exchange of products.

At present, in our agriculture, workers only "take labour as profit." To have more products and higher incomes, they usually increase their working time and their labour intensity. Compared with other occupations such as services and commerce, agricultural production always brings about lower productivity and incomes. Besides, the price of agricultural products is far more lower than that of industrial products, consumer goods and materials for agricultural production.

Generally speaking, *Vietnamese farmers still face many difficulties*. Their level of production and living standard are low, especially in mountainous, far and remote areas, which are inhabited chiefly by ethnic minority people with a self-sufficient economy. A number of families still live as nomads. The populations have very little capital; the State's investments are limited; the infrastructure is very weak; roads and irrigational works are in shortage.

In the plains and midlands, farmers have more favourable conditions to develop the commodity economy. However they also lack capital and means of production. Meanwhile, changes of price in the market brings about more difficulties for them.

1. *Nhân Dân* daily, 20th February 1998.

The public expresses concerns about the differentiation between rich and poor households in rural areas, about the gap between different regions of the country, between urban and rural areas. Opinions have been raised to request the Party and State to have guidelines for overcoming difficulties and shortcomings and improving the situation.

The relation between economic growth and social development in rural areas is being handled in the direction toward *pushing up the activities of wealthy households* in making fortunes and giving help to poor households in a more effective way. Attention is being paid to economic *growth and social justice* by policy makers, who are seeking to balance this relation with effective measures.

Table 28: Basic situation of households (Results of surveys of agriculture and rural areas in 1994)

Number of surveyed households	Number of rural households (Nationwide)	Classified by the nationality of the household head		
		Kinh	Other ethnic groups	% of the total number of households
Total	11,974,515	10,484,208	1,490,307	
a) Occupations				
- Households of agriculture	9,528,896	8,157,759	1,371,137	79.57
- Households of forestry	18,156	15,371	2,775	0.15
- Households of aquaculture	229,409	226,321	3,588	1.91
- Households of industry, small industry, handicraft	160,370	157,707	2,663	1.3
- Households of construction	31,914	31,503	411	0.26
- Households of commerce	384,272	369,337	14,935	3.2
- Households of services	141,657	137,778	3,879	1.18
- Others	1,479,341	1,388,422	90,919	12.35
b) Types of households				
- Doing the household economy and working in production groups	7,078,179	6,287,944	790,235	59.1
- Working as hired labour	672,329	615,254	57,065	5.6
- Others	860,264	828,259	32,005	7.18

Table 29: Basic situation of households (Results of surveys of agriculture and rural areas in 1994)

Number of households	Nation-wide	Classified by the nationality of the household head	
		Kinh	Other ethnic groups
1. Number of mouths and laborers working people aged 16 to 60	11,974,515 57,088,078 27,380,589	10,484,208 48,540,229 23,589,197	1,490,307 8,547,849 3,791,339
2. Houses			
-Solid	1,446,771	1,375,945	70,826
-Half-solid	5,522,183	4,982,130	540,033
-Others	5,145,125	4,264,665	880,460
3. Utensils			
-Radios	4,466,108	3,963,355	502,753
-Television sets	2,541,373	2,413,360	128,013
-Motorcycles	1,078,140	1,013,198	64,942
4. Land used by households (ha)			
Total	6,442,612	4,935,058	1,507,554
Including:			
- Land for housing	451,967	368,183	65,784
- Garden	245,582	204,107	41,476
- Rice field	4,961,312	4,003,332	957,980
- Land for vegetables	4,279,891	3,415,184	864,707
- Land for forestry	595,987	250,653	345,334
- Water surface for aquaculture	163,225	151,080	12,145
- Land not yet used	270,121	143,810	126,311
5. Machines of households			
- Tractor	103,929	93,704	10,225
- Water pump	537,809	516,077	21,732
- Thresher	97,808	92,425	5,388
- Rice-husking machine	106,305	85,780	20,525
- Animal food grinding machine	15,157	13,891	1,266
- Electric generator	109,483	28,824	80,659
- Electric engine	90,881	88,344	2,537
- Oil and petrol engine	346,011	324,625	21,376

Table 30: Average monthly wage of men, women and comparison between men's and women's incomes in 7 rural areas (VND 1,000)

Gender	Region 1	Region 2	Region 3	Region 4	Region 5	Region 6	Region 7	Total
Women	48.4	63.3	48.2	82.3	82.1	111.5	64.8	67.8
Men	59.8	74.6	60.9	104.3	120.4	183.7	111.4	97.9
Women's wage compared with men's wage %	81	85	79	78	68	60	58	69

Region 1: Mountainous areas and Midlands of North Vietnam

Region 2: Red River Delta

Region 3: Former 4th Zone

Region 4: Coastal area of Central Vietnam

Region 5: Central Highlands

Region 6: Eastern part of South Vietnam

Region 7: Mekong River Delta

Source: Data collected during the surveys of the population of different regions in 1991-1993. General Statistic Bureau, Hanoi, 1994.

Table 31: Interviews with households on living conditions (general surveys of household economy in 1994)

	Total %	Urban areas	Rural areas
1. Causes of Poverty			
- No land or not enough land for production	45.7	35.76	47.74
- Lack or deficiency of capital	76.81	71.64	77.88
- Lack or deficiency of labour force	23.04	19.73	23.72
- Lack of knowledge and experience about production	30.44	21.21	32.34
- Natural calamity	17.87	6.06	20.5
- Policies and regulations	2.29	2.59	2.23
- Illness	29.91	30.7	29.75
- Other causes	24.43	25.4	24.23
2. Households' living standard (compared with that in 1990)			
- More difficulties	8.17	10.98	7.24
- Little changes	25.68	28.68	24.69
- Better	66.15	60.34	68.87
3. Households' living standard (compared with that in 1992)			
- More difficulties	8.54	11.33	7.68
- Little changes	27.63	30.10	20.81
- Better	63.83	58.57	65.57

Table 32: Who makes decisions in the family? Surveys of the two communes: Cát Quế (Hà Tây province) and Dục Tú (suburb of Hanoi) carried out in 1995 by the Centre for Family and Women Studies (%)

Items of work	Cát Quế					Dục Tú				
	Mainly, the husband	Mainly, the wife	Both spouses	Children	Parents and other people	Total	Mainly, the husband	Mainly, the wife	Both spouses	Children
1. Orientation for production	43.5	14.70	31.40	1.90	8.50	100	26	30.7	38.3	0.5
2. Money borrowing	43.8	26.4	19.5	1.8	9.5	100	22.6	57.7	29.6	
3. Child education	17.9	29.8	46.7		5.4	100	9.6	33.7	56.1	
4. Medical examination for family members	17.6	36.6	43.1	0.7	1.3	100	16.7	31	51.2	0.6
5. Visit to friends and relatives	43.9	9.5	37.8	0	13.8	100	10.4	18.7	66.5	
6. Career orientation for children	35.8	27.4	42.3	0	1.5	100	29.8	14	52.6	1.8
7. Inviting guests to visit the house	49.6	3.3	23.4	0	19.3	100	21.3	8.1	60.6	0.6
8. Selling of products of the family	16.6	32.3	24.1	1.6	6.4	100	8.3	52.8	30	0.6
9. Construction and repair of houses	43.4	6.9	28.9	0.6	19.1	100	81.5	2.5	48.8	0.6
10. Purchase and hire of land	53.6	5.3	21.1	2.6	15.8	100	17.6	11.8	69.7	
11. The number of births	10.3	11.6	75.8	0.5	1	100	8	11.7	79.1	
12. Marriage of children	15.2	9.1	66.6	0	9.1	100	15.4	7.7	76.9	

2. Male and female workers in the rural household economy, employment and incomes

The household is the key economic unit and the basic social unit in Vietnamese rural areas. The household economy involves male and female workers, both strong and weak. In the labour division, there is coordination between men and women, the husband and the wife, but there are also differences concerning the right to decide on different tasks and the enjoyment of labor products.

Studying rural society, we should pay attention to the differences between male and female workers, and their consequences with regard to the life of the family and community. Rural society is not homogenous; together with the above-said differences, there are also differences between various social classes and strata. At present, the description and analysis of women's activities, favourable conditions and difficulties are often "diluted" in the presentation of the general situation, which gives us the impression that the behaviour and deeds of women are similar to those of men. In reality, there are differences between these two sexes.

Besides a number of common and similar points, men and women have different needs, wishes and interests. In the family, there is some labour division which is not often based on the health and biological characteristics of women and men, but is decided according to age-old customs, habits and tradition.

a) Regarding gender equality in the family

Women have three functions: production, reproduction, and participation in the management of society. Men have only two functions: production and management. Women often must take charge of household maintenance activities (even now, sociological surveys still show that from 70% to 80% of housework are done by women), although men can do and do well a great part of this work.

In reality, only very few husbands are doing households in place of their wives, because men in general do not like this kind of work, and

would not volunteer to do it. Women have to spend much time and efforts on housework and childcare, and those chores do not bring about incomes for them. Meanwhile, their husbands participate in economic activities in the market and *their incomes are higher than those of women.*

The household is a unit of production and at the same time a unit of consumption. *The results of the wife's labour are often used to meet the needs of the family.* Those results are *not calculated in currency*, and cannot be sold to "have cash." Therefore, wives in general have very little money in comparison with their husbands, and they must depend on the latter concerning cash incomes. In the household economy, men and women have different rights. The majority of household heads are men (at present in rural areas, 76% of household heads are men; 24% are women). Women are considered to have an important role in the family, but they have only a dim role in the capacity of master having the right to decide on different family affairs. *The husband has the decisive word in the utilization of land*, the transfer or rent of land, the borrowed money, the purchase of production means, the labour division in the family and the use of family incomes. The right to decide on family affairs of the wife does not go beyond the selling and purchase of food and articles for daily consumption of family members, and the care for the children (See Table 32).

In the family, the husband often has higher cash income in comparison with his wife, and has the right to decide on how to use this income. He has more freedom than his wife in the economic field, and often has the right to freely spend the money of the family. Moreover, many husbands tend to use money for their individual needs more than for improving the family's living conditions.

In the implementation of *family planning*, in a great number of peasant families, it is often the wife who has to use contraceptive means (there are cases in which the husbands not only refuse to implement family planning, but also try to prevent their wives from using contraceptive means). And in many cases, it is the husband who decides on the number of children in the family, as well as the time to give birth. Due to the idea that the family

needs to have male children to perpetuate the lineage, many husbands (and their parents) force their wives to continue to give birth to the third, the fourth child or more, in the hope of having at least one son. Therefore, 90% of women having already two daughters continue to give birth to the third child; 60% of women having three daughters continue to give birth to the fourth or fifth child. In many cases, even women themselves do not like to give birth to any more child.¹ The reproductive health of rural women is then not ensured. They even do not have the right to decide on the number of their children, and the interval between two births.

b) The special role of women in agricultural production and rural areas, in the past and at present; the tendency of feminization of agricultural production and the way to overcome this tendency

In Vietnam, from time immemorial, agriculture has always been the traditional job of women. During the 30 years of the resistance war for national liberation, when their husbands and sons went to the battlefield, women stayed in their villages and shouldered the whole burden of the work on the rice field with the help of children and old people.

Until now, *the percentage of women in agriculture remains very high* and it tends to go up (in 1991 women accounted for 51.7% of the total number of agricultural workers; in 1996 this percentage grew to 52%).

At present, *women take charge of most stages in the process of agricultural production*, from transplanting rice-seedlings (totally done by women) to caring for already grown plants, irrigating the field, harvesting, sun-drying paddy, husking rice, etc. (the greatest part of those jobs are done by women).

In recent years, a number of men have begun to participate more in agricultural production. At the same time, many men have to leave their families and agricultural production to go to find jobs in cities or far-flung

regions. Women in those families have to undertake all the work on the field including ploughing, harrowing and spraying insecticides.

At the same time, there are other factors in the process of change of the management mechanism leading to the increase in the number of workers – mainly female workers – in agriculture. A number of women who have to leave their offices or enterprises due to staff reduction, return to agricultural production. Other women have to return to rural areas, because they cannot market the products of their small industries and handicrafts, especially after the collapse of the East European market.

In Vietnam, at present, there are *more female workers than male workers in agricultural production*. This is a sign of backwardness of the country's economy. It is necessary to create many new jobs for women in non-agricultural occupations, help women raise their educational level and grasp necessary knowledge which would allow them to shift from agriculture to other new trades.

The reduction of the number of workers in agriculture should go in pair with the increase in the number of people who serve agriculture in industrial enterprises, and the increase in investment in technologies in service of agriculture. Those technologies can attract a great number of workers, especially women, to participate in processing agricultural products, improving their quality, preserving food and foodstuffs, packaging, etc. They continue to serve agriculture, not on the rice fields like before, but in enterprises, factories, or at home. In developed countries, expenses for each meal include 10% for agricultural production, and 90% for industrial production in service of agriculture.

In Vietnam the percentage is, perhaps, 70-80% for agricultural production. This situation is unfavourable for workers and for the national economy and should be changed.

c) Employment and income of rural female workers

Women participate in agriculture and forestry in the capacity of wife in the family, or independent producer, or hired worker. Their positions and incomes are different, depending on specific cases.

1. Vietnam through the Gender Prism, Op. cit. p. 11.

Until 1994, 83% of rural women engaged in agriculture, forestry, aquaculture, *mainly worked in the household economy, and private enterprises; they were mainly self-employed.* From time to time they could hire some workers. Statistics show that 76.4% of rural women worked for the household economy, 10.3% for the private economic sector, 0.3% for the collective sector; 12.1% for the State sector.¹

In recent years, there has emerged a contingent of rural women working for wages, hired by families or farm owners, especially in the harvest time.²

However in general, *there is in rural areas only a small number of women working for wages.* The great majority of women are engaged in the self-sufficient economy. Their products are used by family members and it is difficult to calculate in cash. Sometimes, they sell fruits or chickens in the markets in order to have money to buy some consumer goods, but in fact this is not yet commodity production. They have very limited incomes in cash. Therefore, in the family, *women work hard but their income in cash is always lower than that of men.*

In rural areas, the number of female workers aged 16 to 59 is 3.5 times greater than that of female workers in urban areas. The figure may be even greater because in rural areas, girl children of 9 or 10 years old can already tend cattle, and old women of 60 or 65 years old can still transplant rice seedlings, pull grass and harvest. Hence, the lack of jobs in rural areas is much more serious than in urban areas. Women work with all their energy on the plot of land allotted to them but they earn not enough for their living because the productivity is very low. They have very small capital to invest in fertilizers, new strains or new technologies. They only use manual labour. Sometimes they can pull the plough in the place of buffaloes in order to save the money that would be spent on hiring ploughmen.

1. Results of the surveys carried out in 1994 in 11 provinces of South Vietnam, by the Ministry of Labour, Invalids, and Social Affairs.

2. According to Prof. Tường Lai, 30% of peasant households regulate their surplus workforce by working for wages. *Sociology Review*, April 1991.

Hard working conditions are characteristic of rural women's labour.

Rural women are working from 12 to 14 hours every day, 16 hours in harvest time. However, they still have the *need to find more jobs* to increase their incomes and support their families.

Agricultural production has a seasonal character. During the year, there are periods in which farmers are unoccupied. For female farmers, the concept "unoccupied" has only a relative significance. In fact, they temporarily cease to do farm work to be engaged in other jobs such as small industry and handicraft, small trade, animal husbandry, or production of alcohol. Those activities often bring about only small incomes. However, women have to accept to do so for they do not have opportunities and conditions to find well-paid jobs.

In the rural labour market, *the pay for a woman's workday is always lower than that for a man's workday.* Usually, the pay for a ploughman's workday is twice greater than that for a woman who transplants rice seedlings. This payment is done according to custom and practice. The prejudice leading to underestimating the value of women's labour, in comparison with men's labour, has become a social practice accepted by everybody, including women themselves. This also influences the payment for men's and women's labour in other occupations.

In the labour market, women cannot compete with men. In many cases, this is not because women have less abilities. *They suffer losses due to prejudices* concerning the difficulties they may face: child care, household maintenance, impossibility to work far from home or to work regularly. In general, the value of a woman's workday is low, and in the use of female workers, there are cases of over-exploitation, especially when women are hired for seasonal occupations, without a labor contract or with only a verbal contract. At present, there is not yet any organ to protect the interests of hired workers in rural areas.

Generally speaking, women's wages are lower than men's, and *women have less incomes in cash in comparison with men.* On average, the

monthly salary of women accounts for only 64% of that of men. In the rural areas of the Mekong River delta, women's salary accounts only for 58% of that of men, the lowest percentage in the whole country. In the Red River delta, this percentage is 85%, the highest. This is due to the women's movement which is stronger in the Northern part of the country, where gender equality is more recognized (See Table 30).

The low and unjust pay for female workers has weakened the position of the wife in the decision of family affairs, contrary to the authority of the husband. In general, men have higher cash incomes, although women mostly contribute a greater part than men to production and reproduction.

To the question "Who in the family has higher income?" the surveyed women answer, "The husband." But regarding the *contribution to the family welfare*, most women estimate that the greatest contribution is made by the wife who has to ensure good meals for the family, health care for the children and old people and doing housechores.

Through this, we see not only the *economic value* but also the *social value* of the efforts made by women in contributing to the welfare of the family and the community.

In general, the incomes of rural female workers in agriculture are lower than men's and lower than the average incomes of workers in other occupations. At the same time, there are differences between the incomes of various female workers' groups. Households specialized in agriculture, which account for more than 50% of the total number of rural households, often have the lowest incomes.

At present, three-quarters of the poor rural households are specialized in agriculture. Meanwhile, households doing at the same time agriculture and non-agricultural occupations have higher incomes; especially, households specialized in non-agricultural occupations have much higher incomes.

Households doing only cultivation have also lower incomes in comparison with households engaged at the same time in cultivation and animal

husbandry. Households headed by single women often have no capital and knowledge to develop at the same time cultivation, animal husbandry and non-agricultural occupations.

3. The diversification of employment in rural areas affects the distribution of male and female workers to different occupations

The solution for the lack of jobs in Vietnam is linked with the diversification of labour and occupations, so that rural people do not only cultivation or agriculture. This is a process of *change in the agricultural economic structure*, to include both cultivation and animal husbandry. This is also a process of *change in the rural economic structure*, to include agricultural and non-agricultural occupations.

The lack of jobs has affected both men and women. But at present, the number of people who *move to non-agricultural occupations*, with better jobs and higher incomes, is *more among men than among women*. They work right in the locality, or they go far from home, to cities and towns, or developed regions. They leave all farm work and family affairs to women, their wives or mothers, who have to shoulder the whole burden of family life.

Usually in rural areas, cultivation and animal husbandry are women's jobs. Women have some secondary jobs such as producing bamboo baskets or alcohol (to gain wine dregs for raising pigs), or doing small trade on market days. However, those jobs are *unstable* and bring about only *low incomes*.

So, at present, changes in the economic structure of agriculture and rural areas are taking place *in an unfavorable way for women*, pushing women to strenuous jobs with low incomes.

Meanwhile, women have abilities and conditions to well practise many non-agricultural occupations such as food and foodstuffs processing, preservation of agricultural products, production of a number of handicraft and

small industry products. Those jobs can be done by them at home or near their home; allowing women to combine productive activities with childcare and household maintenance. For instance, in Hải Dương and Hưng Yên provinces, fruit drying have been developed. And every year at harvest time for longans and litchis, plenty of jobs are created for women, including girl children and old women, who skin fruits or process medicinal plants.

The *development of occupations in service of agriculture* only needs small capital, little skills training, using skilful manual labour, combined with half-mechanized and mechanized instruments. This is an important direction for the creation of jobs in rural areas, increasing the value of agricultural products, raising families' incomes, and pushing up the commodity production.

But the diversification of employment in rural areas should be linked with the *rational distribution of labour for men and for women*, with due attention paid to the attraction of female workers to non-agricultural occupations suitable for them, while more men should be concentrated in agriculture, construction and transport.

This will help to *balance male and female workers right in rural areas*, reducing the number of men who leave home to find jobs in cities, lessening the division of families, creating conditions for families members to live together, allowing families to care better for their children and guarantee family happiness.

The development of non-agricultural occupations in rural areas will also help to limit the spontaneous migration of young girls - including married young women - who leave their villages for cities and towns to do small trade on the street, and live temporarily in urban areas in very bad conditions.

Concerning the *rural economic structure*, the objectives pointed out by the Vietnamese State for the year 2000 include: reduction of the percentage of agriculture from 70% in 1996 to 50%; increase of industry and handicraft from 14% to 25%; increase of services from 15% to 25%;

concentration on a number of important groups of occupations, such as agricultural, forest, aquacultural products processing; small industry and the handicrafts producing consumer goods and articles for export, production of building materials; rural engineering; economic and technical services.¹ To achieve the above objectives, the State should accord assistance to rural people in capital (to lend money at low interest rates), sources providing materials for production, markets for rural products (to create large markets inside the country and abroad).

4. Introduction of new technologies; industrialization and modernization of rural areas, and the participation of women

As defined by the Party and State, the important point of the cause for industrialization and modernization of the country is first and foremost in agriculture and rural areas. *Women, a basic workforce, should be considered the main force*, and should have a very important responsibility in the implementation of this strategy.

It is regrettable that during many years, the cadres in charge of mapping out development plans for agriculture and rural areas have made light of the above problem.

They do not pay due attention to women, the main object of reception and implementation of this strategy in rural areas. In the process of agricultural development in Vietnam, attention is paid to women when they are to be mobilized and trained in order to have good skills in transplanting rice seedlings. In fact, women have renovated the technique of rice transplanting in the whole country. But in general, in activities to encourage the development of agriculture, to renovate the technique of cultivation and animal husbandry, to use new seeds, fertilizers, insecticides, etc. the people mobilized in propaganda campaigns and participants

1. *Vietnamese Agriculture Entering the 21st Century*. National Political Publishing House, 1998, p. 232.

in the relevant training courses mostly are men, who are thought to be able to give guidance to women, when they finish the training courses. Attention has not been paid to creating conditions for women to participate in great numbers in such courses. Therefore, in many cases, the workers who do the jobs have no possibility to attend training courses, while those who have learned, do not apply their knowledge because they do not do those jobs!

Men are also invited to attend training courses in the use of mechanized and half-mechanized instruments. And men are given the responsibility to use those instruments in cooperatives, as well as in families. Only few women have this responsibility: women are thought to have not enough physical strength to control those instruments. They have little knowledge about this; they have not participated in training courses. So, women continue to do simple manual work which is strenuous and brings about low incomes. *And the consequences of the improvement of techniques in production may lead to the increase of working hours for women and the increase of the rest time for men!*

It is not strange then to see that in most households headed by single women or women whose husbands are absent, or women with no husbands (widows, divorced or unmarried women), households in mountainous, remote areas, the old way of cultivation is preserved. Very few new techniques are applied as women have no opportunities to learn them. Poor women dare not hire workers and machines for work on the rice fields, and the only way for them is to increase their labour intensity, in order to have higher productivity and better incomes in cultivation and animal husbandry. Some of them follow the example of other families and try to use new seeds and new techniques. But since they have not attended training courses, they do not understand well the new techniques. As a consequence, they are likely to face failure and losses and return to the old way of working.

At present, women are playing a very important role in agricultural production and in the development of the rural economy. This is reality. To

ensure the success of the industrialization and modernization of agriculture and rural areas, this force should be mobilized more actively. Women should be provided with the guidance and services, to help them develop effectively cultivation and animal husbandry, organize many diversified occupations in rural areas, contribute to the industrialization and modernization of production.

In Vietnam, many changes are taking place in rural areas, influencing the relations between men and women. Therefore, in the implementation of programmes for encouragement of agriculture, application of new technologies, development of diversified occupations, we cannot rely on the old distribution of labour in the family. Attention should be paid to the changes that occur in the distribution of labour between women and men in many rural areas at present.

Changes in the improvement of the production process in households will be linked with the *new distribution of labour in the family, between the wife and the husband*, and the new distribution of labour, employment, *between various households in the same locality*, in the direction of *specialization and diversification* of the forms of labour, employment, in pair with the development of the labour market.

Many households will hire workers (having professional skills or physical strength) to be put in charge of some stages of production of the family. Members of those households themselves may work for wages, be hired by other households, be put in charge of a number of jobs suitable for their abilities.

Therefore, the implementation of State policies on rural areas as well as the relevant development plans requires attention be paid to the suitability of those policies and plans, which must be in conformity with the conditions, abilities and circumstances of *concrete people who in fact implement and organize the implementation* of those policies and plans, especially household heads of both sexes.

Women, who account for 53% of the total number of workers in rural areas, should be considered the most important objects of the development

strategy for rural areas, with two significances: *Women will contribute a great part to the successful implementation of different projects; women will enjoy the basic gains, which are very important for them, of the above strategy.*

Table 33: Women aged 15 upwards in rural areas.

Total number of men and women: 29,027,973;

Number of women: 14,662,758

1. Educational standard of women

- Illiterate :	
- Not yet graduated from 1st grade of general school:	1,192,301
- Already graduated from 1st grade:	3,708,333
- Already graduated from 2nd grade:	4,178,126
- Already graduated from 3rd grade:	1,107,140

2. Professional and technical standards of women

- No training:	13,959,345
- Primary level:	209,561
- Technical workers with diplomas:	37,088
- Technical worker without diplomas:	118,014
- Secondary vocational school:	367,957
- College and university:	105,957
- Post-university level:	195

3. Occupations of women

- Agriculture:	11,919,091 women, accounting for 81.96% of the total number of female workers.
- Industry and construction:	804,715 women, 5.53% of the total number of female workers.
- Services:	1,818,836 women, 12.51% of the total number of female workers

4. Economic sectors involving women

- State sector:	596,247
- Non-State sector:	6,706,313
- Foreign enterprises:	27,849
- Joint venture:	7,212,236

5. Positions of women in labour relations

- Women who work for wages:	1,337,407
- Enterprises' owners without hired workers:	3,087,649
- Enterprises' owners with hired workers:	30,505
- Workers in household economy:	10,055,893

Source: *Employment Situation in Vietnam, 1996*. Statistical Publishing House, 1997.

IV. FEMALE INTELLECTUALS FACING THE REQUIREMENTS OF NATIONAL INDUSTRIALIZATION AND MODERNIZATION AND THE SCIENTIFIC TECHNOLOGICAL REVOLUTION OF THE 21ST CENTURY

1. *The particularly important role of intellectuals in national industrialization and modernization*

The Vietnamese Communist Party and State are pushing up the cause for industrialization and modernization of the country, making efforts to turn Vietnam into an industrial country by the year 2020, and grasp quickly the achievements of the scientific technological revolution in the 21st century.

"The process of industrialization of our country takes place in a moment when human society, due to the wonderful achievements of the modern scientific and technological revolution, is moving step by step to the intellectual civilization, and information society, whose most outstanding characteristics are as follows: knowledge and creative thinking are decisive factors for development; science is a direct production force; technology is unceasingly renovated, etc. We should transform the knowledge of the time into our own knowledge, bypass many steps of technological development to come directly to the newest technology, if we want to keep up with more advanced countries."¹

Our epoch is characterized by the fact that *the strength and the role of knowledge and intellect* are promoted and there is a tendency to transform workers into intellectuals.

At present, bringing into play human resources does not mean bringing into play the power of muscles or simple manual labour, diligence, application, traditional experiences - the inherent qualities of the Vietnamese people, especially Vietnamese women. It means bringing into play the power of mind.

1. Article by Đặng Hữu. *Communist Review*, July, 1999.

Intellect is becoming a factor of production, a direct production force, a motive force for pushing up the development of a new-modelled production with new technologies totally different from those used before. In social production of the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, there is a rapid increase in the content of intellect, in both quantitative and qualitative aspects. Productivity and the effectiveness of labour grow many times; raw materials are economized, spendings reduced, and environmental pollution checked. The proportion of manual labour used to create products has much decreased. During the first years of the 20th century, this proportion was 9 out of 10 products in the whole world; during the 1990's the figure was 1 out of 5. It is forecast that in 2010, this proportion will be only 1 out of 10.

To transform workers into intellectuals is becoming a common tendency of humankind. Especially in highly developed industrial countries, the receipts from the "grey matter" labour account for half of the Gross National Product. At present, people are talking a lot about the *knowledge-based economy*, a revolution in the economic structure, in which the utilization of knowledge is the main factor creating the strength of the national economy.

The characteristic of the knowledge-based economy is the strong development of *science and technology*, especially *high-tech*. This economy creates products with a great content of knowledge. *Services* are economic activities attracting the greatest number of workers, creating the greatest part of GDP, particularly the knowledge-based services. Social investments are mainly reserved for science and technology.

The economy is being globalized, commerce liberalized, and the economic growth is becoming sustainable with high quality.¹

The knowledge-based economy's subject is the intellectual worker. Scientific and technological creations become the *motive force* for

1. Article by Hồ Anh Hải. *Communist Review*, Issue 3, 1999.

economic growth. The workers with creative abilities become the most precious property. Knowledge is a kind of *invisible, inexhaustible* resource waiting for human beings to exploit in the best way. The available natural resources should be exploited while new sources of materials should be found to avoid pollution of the environment.

The emergence of the knowledge-based economy overshadows the role of the material economy (agricultural economy, industrial economy, which is based on the exploitation and production of visible and limited resources. When the three main factors of production- land, labour, and capital- prove to be limited, it is necessary to have the new factor of production: knowledge. In the knowledge-based economy, science, technology and education are highly developed; the educational and professional levels of workers are very high. Society needs to have mechanisms to create *conditions for the development of individual resources*, to evaluate correctly the talent of each individual, and give him/her deserving pay, to have drastic regulations to protect the right to intellectual ownership. The percentage of people doing manual work and secretariat work will step by step decrease, while the percentage of intellectuals will increase. It is forecast that in 2010, intellectuals will account for 80% of the total number of workers.¹

The factor "knowledge" is of special importance, being the foundation for the strength to push up socio-economic development of each country. The object of exploitation is shifting to human beings themselves. The development of each society is measured by the intellectual level of its citizen.

The Vietnamese economy is still basically a backward agricultural economy. Therefore, we need time to complete industrialization before moving to the knowledge-based economy. But it is clear that *the role of intellectuals* is a very important factor, allowing our country to advance

1. Article by Hồ Anh Hải. *Communist Review*, Issue 3, 1999.

rapidly on the path of industrialization and modernization. This is a *vital factor* in our competition with other countries in the world for increasing GDP, improving the people's living conditions and achieving a solid development.

The Vietnamese Communist Party and State have already worked out policies to encourage intellectuals. At present, more attention is being paid to creating conditions for the development of the contingent of intellectuals, for their successful work, helping them to bring into play their intelligence and talent, and contribute more to the development of the country. The atmosphere of democracy in scientific activities helps intellectuals to work freely, to take the initiative and to create.

The Resolution of the 6th Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party underline: "For intellectuals, the most important thing is to ensure their freedom of creation."

The 7th Plenum of the Party Central Committee (7th tenure) adopted a resolution on "the orientations for the development of industry and technology until the year 2000, in the direction toward industrialization and modernization."

The Resolution of the 8th Congress of the Party affirmed: One of the most important preconditions for the success of industrialization and modernization is the improvement of the people's intellectual standard, and the development of human resources of good quality. The *contingent of intellectuals* is a particularly important potentiality that needs to be built in both quantitative and qualitative aspects to meet the new requirements.

Talking about the improvement of the people's intellectual standard, the improvement of the professional level of the Vietnamese workforce, we should pay attention to the contingent of *female workers* who are now concentrated in simple manual work of two economic branches: agriculture and industry. At the same time, we should pay attention to the contingent of *female intellectuals*, a motive force, a precondition for the broad development of the intellectual force of our country.

2. Actual state of the contingent of female intellectuals in Vietnam at present

The contingent of Vietnamese female intellectuals has developed in pair with the development of the nation and the progress of Vietnamese women, since 1975, especially since the beginning of the all-round Renovation process more than 10 years ago.

To evaluate the development and potentialities of our female intellectuals, we should make analyses in both quantitative and qualitative aspects.

According to the temporary criteria in Vietnam, people having college, university and post-university education and doing mainly intellectual jobs belong to the intelligentsia. The 1989 population census in Vietnam shows that, among the total number of cadres having college, university and post-university education working in 33 branches of the national economy, 39% of them are women.

According to the statistics of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment, in 1992, among the total number of scientific and technical workers having received training in different branches, 37.3% were women.

Women account for more than one-third of the total number of intellectuals, 50 years after the victory of the Revolution to liberate our nation. This is an encouraging fact, although there are many pending problems that will be analysed later.

About the *social structure*:

Considering the social origin of female intellectuals, in the past the majority of them belonged to families of intellectuals and government employees; at present many of them belong to other kinds of families.

According to surveys carried out in 1992 by the Vietnam Women's Union Central Executive Committee in coordination with five universities, 50% of female intellectuals belonged to families of workers and farmers, 40% of them belonged to families of intellectuals. This is because under the revolutionary regime, children of the working people can go to school, and many of them become intellectuals.



Would-be music teachers at Nam Định School of Culture and Arts.
Photo: Trần Thiêm, Vietnam News Agency

Regarding female students, who will succeed the present contingent of female intellectuals, the 1994 sociological survey carried out by National University shows: 26% of students come from intellectual families; 20% from civil servants' families, 15% from workers' families, 9% from peasant families. These figures demonstrate the consequence of the 1989-1993 period. At the time, due to reduction of State subsidies, families began to pay school fees for their children attending the junior and senior general schools, as well as colleges or universities; many students, especially those who come from peasant and worker families, first and foremost, female students, dropped out of school.

At present, *most of female students come from the Kinh ethnic group*. Only a small number of female students belong to different ethnic minorities. Until 1993, among the total number of women who graduated from various universities, only 7,340 persons belonged to different ethnic minorities.¹

Many ethnic minority groups have no female intellectuals, and the percentage of women who graduated from secondary schools is only 8%.

The great majority of female intellectuals are working in State agencies and in the State economic sector. However, with the development of the market mechanism, in recent years, the number of female intellectuals, female experts who move to the individual and private economic sectors, has been increasing.

The contingent of female intellectuals includes *many generations*. Some of them received training before the 1945 August Revolution. Others were trained in the resistance war against French and American aggressors. A great number of female intellectuals were trained after 1954 and 1975.

In general, those intellectuals who are still working now received training chiefly after 1975, the moment of restoration of peace in Vietnam. They graduated from different universities inside the country and abroad, in the former socialist countries, especially in the former Soviet Union, in

1. Report of Prof. Chu Tuấn Nhã, Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment. *Women Studies Review*, Issue 4, 1993.

developed capitalist countries such as France, England, United States, Sweden, Holland, etc.

According to the surveys carried out by the Vietnam Women's Union, among female cadres with university and post-university graduation, 56% studied at foreign universities, 43.5% followed regular courses. Others strove by way of self-instruction to attain the post-university level, taking part in various in-service training courses.

Regarding the *occupational structure*:

According to the report of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment¹ in 1990, Vietnamese female intellectuals graduated from colleges and universities with the following scientific branches:

- Natural sciences: 36,89% (of the total number of graduate men and women)
- Technical sciences: 38.5%
- Social sciences and humanities: 38.92%
- Medicine and pharmacy: 41.8%

After graduation, the female cadres were distributed to different branches (See Table 35). So *there are differences between the training and the utilization of female intellectuals*. We can see that the greatest percentage of women intellectuals were involved in social sciences and humanities: 51%; then comes the percentage in natural sciences: 30%.

Meanwhile the percentage of female intellectuals in medicine and pharmacy, technical sciences, agriculture, forestry, aquaculture, is only less than 10% (although there are great numbers of female workers in those branches).

Statistics show that nearly half of male intellectuals are concentrated in technical sciences and industry, while female intellectuals are dispersed to many different branches (See Table 34)

1. Report of Prof. Chu Tuấn Nhã. Op. cit.

Table 34: Training structure among men and women (%)

Trained branches	Women	Men
- Natural sciences	7.4	5.2
- Social sciences	17.6	8.9
- Economic sciences	13.5	13
- Technical and industrial sciences	19.9	47.2
- Agronomy, forestry, ichthyology	5.9	7.8
- Medicine and pharmacy	13.8	6.9
- Culture, sports	0.6	2
- Philology, linguistics	14.8	5.3
- Others	4.5	3.7
Total	100	100

Source: *Surveys of Vietnamese People's Living Standard 1992-93*.
General Statistical Office, 1994.

Table 35: Distribution of women graduating from universities in 1993 to different occupations (%)

- Natural sciences	30
- Technical sciences	7
- Medicine and pharmacy	8
- Agronomy, forestry, ichthyology	4
- Social sciences and humanities	51

Source: *Report of Prof. Chu Tuấn Nhã, Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment*.
Women Studies Review, No. 4, 1993.

Table 36: Cadres of post-university level (Men and Women)

Academic degree and title	Until 1990		Until 1994	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Professor	196	6	366	23
Associate Professor	1296	45	2671	130
Doctor (2 nd grade)	496	26	500	26
Doctor (1 st grade)	6673	905	7001	983
Percentages				
Professor	97.03	2.67	96.1	3.9
Associate Professor	96.64	3.36	95.36	4.64
Doctor (2 nd grade)	95.02	4.98	95.06	4.94
Doctor (1 st grade)	88.04	11.94	87.67	12.33

Source: *Data on Vietnamese Women 1985-1994*.
Statistical Publishing House, 1998.

In 1995, among the people aged 16 upwards who have finished colleges, universities and higher educational establishments, 36.4% were women and 63.6% were men; among people having professional technical levels, 38.6% were women and 61.4% were men.¹

The above figures show that *the number of women having finished colleges and universities and higher educational establishments is only half of that of men*. This is the manifestation of some inferiority of female intellectuals in comparison with male intellectuals, concerning the quantitative aspect.

According to the report of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment, 60% of women having graduated from different universities (specialized in different scientific branches) are working in *education and training*, (the highest percentage) while only 10% work in industry, 7% in commerce, 6% in healthcare services, 1% in culture and arts, 2% in research institutes for implementation of policies, and 6% in State management.

The above figures show that in a number of important branches such as industry, commerce, healthcare service, culture and arts, the percentage of female experts is too low. This is partly due to the fact that there is not a synchronized plan of training and utilization of intellectuals; in many economic branches. Attention is paid to training activities, but those activities are not linked with the real needs of socio-economic development of the country. So, after graduating from universities, many students remain unemployed as they cannot find jobs suitable for their qualification.

At present, the *development of information technologies and cybernetics* requires from different scientific and economic branches of Vietnam a rapid introduction of new scientific achievements. There is a new tendency for female intellectuals not to work only in traditional branches such as pedagogy, medicine, pharmacy, or culture. But an in-

1. *Women and Men in Vietnam*, by the General Statistical Bureau. Statistical Publishing House. December 1995.

creasing number of them participate in the development of information technologies, cybernetics, informatics, and business management.

This is a new characteristic of the contingent of Vietnamese female intellectuals entering the 21st century.

So, the number of female intellectuals has increased. But how about their quality?

Statistics show that there is only a small number of female intellectuals with high professional levels, but they are not distributed rationally. They are concentrated in medicine and pharmacy, while the lowest percentage is in technical sciences. Until 1995, female intellectuals of high levels, professors, associate professors, doctors (I, II grades) are distributed to different branches as follows:

- Medicine and pharmacy: 27.5%
- Agriculture: 14.6%
- Social sciences: 13.5%
- Natural sciences: 11.4%
- Technical sciences: 4.6%

In comparison with men, the percentage of women having attained post-university levels by 1994 is very low; professors: 3.9%; associate professors: 4.64%; doctors (2nd grade) 4.94%; doctors (1st grade): 12.33%, (See Table 36).

The surveys carried out in 1996 show a small increase; professors: 4% associate professors: 7.8%; doctors (2nd grade): 5.43%; doctor (1st grade): 14.2%.¹

Among the women having attained college and university levels, a rather high percentage receive training in social sciences and humanities: 39%. These sciences have also the highest percentage of women having gained college and university levels: 51%.

1. Data of the General Statistical Bureau, 1997.

However, the percentage of women having gained post-university levels and of female experts with high positions is low.

In fact, *social sciences and humanities* have not yet received due attention and investments by the State. The role of intellectuals in this field is not yet correctly evaluated, although they have a direct influence on the development of human resources, bringing into play the intellectual strength of the future generations. During the National Assembly's discussions on the Law on Science and Technology, many deputies remarked that the Draft Law presented to the National Assembly made light of social sciences and humanities.¹

The fact that little attention is paid to training in social sciences and humanities affects intellectuals of both sexes in this field. At the same time female intellectuals suffer losses due to the lack of attention to the training of women in this scientific branch.

In addition to a good professional level, intellectuals should know *foreign languages* to be able to get access to the achievements of mankind's civilization, to grasp quickly the rich and diversified information on the world information and technology revolution.

At present, the general level of knowledge of foreign languages of the Vietnamese is low, and that of women even lower.

In recent years, in order to find jobs easily, female students have enthusiastically learnt foreign languages, especially English.

However, the percentage of female cadres who can use foreign languages is still low. Only 2.9% of the female cadres under 30 years of age can use one foreign language; 0.7% can use two foreign languages. Among the female cadres aged 31-40 years old, 15.2% can use one foreign language, 1.4% can use two foreign languages. Among the female cadres aged 41-50 years old, 4.6% can use one foreign language, 1.9% can use two two foreign languages. Among the female cadres aged 51-60

1. *Nhân Dân* daily, 3 June, 1999.

years old, 4.3% can use one foreign language, 21.9% can use two foreign languages (usually those female cadres know French, Russian or Chinese, now they learn another foreign language).¹

Learning English has been developing in recent years due to the requirements of daily work: many documents, newspapers, reviews in English that cadres have to read; many conferences, seminars, training courses in which English is the working language. The number of female cadres who can understand and speak English has increased. However, only a small percentage of them speak English well, and the low level of knowledge of foreign languages continues to limit the international relations of Vietnamese female intellectuals, preventing them from developing exchanges with their colleagues of other countries, or raising their professional levels.

At present, the *level of knowledge and occupational structure* of Vietnamese female intellectuals proved to be insufficient in the face of many scientific problems.

The ages of female intellectuals influence the structure.

According to the documents of Prof. Phạm Tất Dong² the average age of doctors of both grades is 50.8 years. Two-thirds of doctors of the 1st grade are in this age bracket; 40.13% of doctors of the 2nd grade are more than 55 years old.

Professors and associate professors aged 46 to 55 account for 39% and 47%; those aged 56 to 65 account for 54% and 39%; those aged 66 upwards account for 7% and 14%. Female intellectuals having attained the post-university level are often more than 50 years old. Only a very small number of them are 40 years old or under 50 years old.

Female cadres retire at the age of 55 (the retirement age of men is 60). Except some agencies that retain female experts for work until the age of 60

1. *Women, Gender, and Development*. Women's Publishing House, 1996: p. 184.

2. Prof. Phạm Tất Dong is Director of the Research Project: "Scientific arguments and policies to bring into play the creative abilities of intellectuals and students."

or more, in general female intellectuals have to leave their jobs at the age of 55. So, in 10 years about 72% of the total of female scientific cadres will reach the retirement age. Meanwhile, the contingent of young female cadres who will replace them is developing very slowly.

Table 37: Students of both sexes of secondary vocational schools, colleges and universities (%)

Educational level	1985-1986		1986-1987		1993-1994	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
- Secondary vocational school	46	54	48.1	51.9	73.9	26.1
- College, University	59.8	40.2	61.4	38.6	71.2	28.8

Source: *Data on Vietnamese Women 1985-1994*.
Statistical Publishing House, 1995.

Table 38: Students of both sexes of different branches (%)

Branches	1985-1986		1992-1993	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
- Industry	91.2	8.8	92.4	7.6
- Fundamental sciences	87.9	22.1	61.7	38.3
- Agriculture, forestry, ichthyology	60.7	39.3	79.5	20.5
- Economics, law	70.6	29.4	65.6	34.5
- Medicine, gymnastics sports	61	39	65.1	34.9
- Culture, arts	64.7	35.3	84.2	15.8
- Pedagogy	39.1	60.9	41.8	58.2

Source: *Data on Vietnamese Women 1985-1994*.
Statistical Publishing House, 1995.

The *imbalanced* structure between different generations of intellectuals in general, of female intellectuals in particular, is creating serious shortages affecting the future development of the intellectual force of our country. At the same time, this is a great obstacle to development of the intellectual resources, necessary to meet the needs of the cause for national industrialization and modernization and integration into the world in the 21st century.

3. Situation of female students who will replace the older generation of female intellectuals

How is the development, in the quantitative and qualitative aspects, of the contingent of female students in recent years?

Comparing the percentages of female students and male students (See Table 37), we find that the percentage of female students in colleges and universities has decreased from 40.2% in the period 1985-1986 down to 28.8% in the period 1994-1995. One important cause is the reduction of State subsidies for educational activities, which forces families to pay school fees for students of the 2nd level upwards. A number of families cannot afford to pay school fees for their children and therefore they let their children drop out.

The most serious was the period 1989-1993: lots of children left school prematurely, especially girl children, and in rural areas. At present, the situation has been improved. The number of students, including university students has increased. This is due partly to the fact that families better understand the necessity to invest in the education for their children, because the latter can find good jobs only when they have a high educational standard. On the other hand, there are now many different forms of training and education, creating conditions for young women and men to attend courses in different universities.

Statistics show that the *highest percentage* of female students is involved in *pedagogy*: 58.2% (See Table 38). The lowest percentage is in industry: 7.6%. The percentage of female students has clearly increased in economics, law, and fundamental sciences. However, in agriculture, forestry, and ichthyology, the percentage of female students has decreased to 20.5%.

At present, the training of the contingent of female intellectuals is being affected by the *labour market*, the need of female students to have good, favourable jobs after graduating from university. In general, they show the tendency to choose occupations that directly meet the needs of the present economic development.

Students of such subjects as foreign trade, informatics, economics, diplomacy, and a number of applied sciences are able to find well-paid jobs easily.

A number of female students make great efforts, overcoming lots of difficulties to attend two universities simultaneously and get two university degrees. They also learn foreign languages and informatics enthusiastically to prepare for themselves enough knowledge to enter the future life.

However, many female students prove to be not active in raising the quality of their studies and their morality. They hope that with the social relations of their own, of their parents, relatives and friends and with money, they can have good jobs after leaving school, without the need to be good or excellent students.

To become qualified female intellectuals to contribute actively to the development of sciences of the country, is not their objective. They pursue *pragmatism*, entering universities to find in the future a cushy job, with rather good incomes and the work place near their home or in big cities. This helps them avoid hard manual work in agriculture and forestry.

The self-consciousness of students tends to be decreasing. The academic records are not good and the percentage of good female students is low. In Hanoi Teachers' Training University No 1, 70.8% of female students are classified as having medium capacity. They lack an ardent ideal to record good achievements in service of the country. Meanwhile, *social evils* are penetrating universities, a number of female students become "high-class" prostitutes to have money to spend. Some of them even are drug addicts, join robbers' gangs, have "loose" relations, resulting in early abortions. Those phenomena cause worries for the whole society.

Considering the *quality of female* students we cannot be optimistic about the quality of the future contingent of female intellectuals. Here we should mention the mistakes in the *policy on education, training and use of intellectuals* in our society.

The plans of training students for different economic branches, devised by various agencies of the Ministry of Education and Training, and various universities, are not in accordance with realities, failing to meet the need for workforce of different bodies and enterprises. Therefore, many graduates from universities cannot find jobs suitable for them. This unsuitable training creates difficulties for students. At the same time, it causes waste of time and money of society.

The above situation is discouraging female students in universities, especially those who are poor or who have their families living in far-flung localities, who have to overcome lots of difficulties. Since their first year in the university, students already show concern about their future employment. When they are third or fourth-year students, employment becomes an obsession for them. A great number of students strive to pass examinations to enter universities of foreign languages, informatics, economics, in the hope to find jobs easily after their graduation. The number of students attending courses in fundamental sciences tends to be decreasing. Schools of the army and security forces attract many young people who think that their employment can be ensured after they finish the schools.

In 1992, 166,600 people could not find jobs after graduating from universities; among them 52% were women. Only 40% of the people having graduated from universities got jobs suitable for their qualification. Among them, the percentage of women was very low.¹

In 1998, more than 20,000 students graduated from regular colleges and universities. Until now, 10,000 of them have not yet found jobs.²

After graduating from universities, a number of women, not willing to work far from big cities to face difficulties and hardships, have left the jobs in which they have been trained in order to find other occupations. At

1. *Higher and Professional Education Review*, August, 1993.

2. *Women's Saturday Review*, 12 June, 1999.

present, branches like agriculture, forestry, or aquaculture need many female experts. However, the number of women in related universities is further decreasing. The number of university graduates who accept to work in the countryside, in agricultural farms or afforestation yards has become fewer and fewer. Meanwhile, the percentage of female intellectuals belonging to ethnic minorities is very low: only 1%.

In fact, there is *irrational distribution of female intellectuals*, not only to various scientific branches, but also to different localities. Scientific cadres, of both sexes, are mainly concentrated in central organs and scientific bodies of the two big cities: Hanoi and Hồ Chí Minh City: 80% of the total number of scientific cadres are working in Hanoi, in Hồ Chí Minh City: 12%; in other cities and provinces: 8%.

The numerous difficulties in communication and transport between big cities and mountainous, remote rural areas, prevent female intellectuals from bringing into play their knowledge to serve the population in those areas. Besides, the State has not yet worked out a priority policy to encourage intellectuals, and experts to work in far, remote areas, for instance those policies on wages, education and training, change of working places after a determined working time limit.

4. Achievements, favourable conditions and difficulties of the contingent of female intellectuals

During many years of persevering endeavour, through two long resistance wars against foreign aggression for national liberation and the difficult years of reconstruction of the country, the contingent of Vietnamese female intellectuals, despite its limitation, has made a *great contribution* to the common achievements of the nation, especially in the development of the Vietnamese intellectual resources. The talent and successes of many Vietnamese women scientists are highly appreciated in the country and abroad.

Up to the end of 1996, the Kovalevskaja prize had been awarded to 19 female scientists and 3 groups of female scientists recording outstanding achievements in natural sciences.

Many female scientists have received the Diploma of Creative Labour offered by the Vietnamese Confederation of Labour (up to 1998, 467 female scientists won this diploma).

The Medal "For the cause of Science and Technology" medal has been awarded to 106 female scientists.

Noteworthy is the fact that up to 1997 the State had awarded the title "People's Teacher" to three women (among the total number of 22 teachers receiving this title); that of "Excellent Teacher" to 372 women; that of "People's Physician" to 4 women; and that of "Excellent physician" to 84 women.

Up to 1998, the State had awarded the title "People's Artist" to 34 women and the title "Excellent Artist" to 287 women.¹

Those are only some figures that cannot reflect the whole contribution of female intellectuals of the country. Many female intellectuals, besides teaching and research works, are also engaged in *management*. Many are directors or vice-directors of institutes, heads or deputy-heads of departments, section chiefs or deputy section chiefs of scientific institutions, universities, enterprises, companies, leaders of State organs at Central and local levels. Many of them have well fulfilled their tasks; their sense of responsibility and management abilities are highly valued by their colleagues. At the same time, they strive to continue scientific research, although they have only limited time. They also pay attention to training young cadres in their fields of work.

In the Renovation period of the country, female scientists and experts - like their male colleagues - have many *favourable conditions* to develop

1. Source: General Statistical Bureau.

scientific activities and to learn to improve their professional level. But they also face new difficulties emerging from the development of the market mechanism, and they have more difficulties than their male colleagues.

Scientific labour or intellectual labour requires the freedom of thought, the independent thinking of individuals, and at the same time, the exchange of ideas with colleagues and other people, and timely reception of new knowledge. Scientific labour is very hard, requiring constantly updated information, new knowledge of the country and the world, knowledge of one's specialty and interdisciplinary branches.

In recent years, with the Renovation of the country, the development of democratic activities, the increase of freedom of thought, scientific activities have been pushed up, particularly in the fields of natural sciences, technique, information technologies, and applied sciences. Many female scientists boldly present their opinions, engage in the research on new things, the application of new achievements to production, and study. Many scientific discussions have been continuously organized in different branches and different localities. Opposing ideas were presented, subjected to debates in a sound atmosphere, as the participants wished to find the best way for the country's development.

The Resolutions of the Vietnamese Communist Party have underlined the role of intellectuals in the industrialization and modernization of the country. The Party considers *knowledge the greatest potential of the country*, and the formation and use of talented people a strategic problem, a *decisive factor* for the future of society. The Vietnamese Party and State encourage scientists to participate in the discussion over the development strategy for the country until the year 2000, and necessary policies. Different opinions, suggestions and plans of scientists have been taken into consideration by the competent leaders, who carefully consider various proposals in order to find out the best projects. The fact that *scientists are listened to and their correct proposals are accepted* creates a driving force for them to use their talent to serve the country.

On the other hand, due to the *open door policy* and the development of international relations, Vietnamese intellectuals can get in touch rather quickly and easily with the world's sources of information (newspapers, reviews, books, information bulletins). This is a very precious food for thought for Vietnamese female intellectuals. But this requires from them the knowledge of one or two foreign languages to read books and documents, to exchange ideas with their foreign colleagues. In recent years, many scientific seminars or conferences organized with the participation of foreign experts, study tours, training courses organized in many countries, have helped Vietnamese female intellectuals improve their knowledge and get access to useful information on the achievements of modern sciences in the world. The support of a number of international organizations (financial assistance, provision of working facilities, modern machines, etc) has helped many female scientists and groups of female scientists gain more favourable conditions for their work.

Vietnamese female scientists more and more *take the initiative in research work and creation*. They participate in research projects at different levels; local, ministerial, and State, including projects carried out with international organizations. In the market mechanism, many enterprises and companies are ready to pay for activities of scientists conducting experiments on new technologies, or doing research on the adaptation of modern technologies to make them suitable for the Vietnamese conditions. Good experts are always invited to cooperate with enterprises and they do not lack jobs. Many female scientists now can earn their living with intellectual labour and must not do extra-jobs contrary to their training.

Therefore, responsible scientists strive to overcome difficulties to make new progress, useful for the country and people. They have more than before favourable conditions, abundant information, funds for scientific researches, and they feel at ease in their thinking and creation.

Scientific activities at present require a rapid tempo, fixed time limit for researches, effective surveys close to reality and serving practice. Scientific research is not dealing with general theories or making

"excerpts from books here and there". In all scientific branches, including natural and social sciences, fundamental sciences, intellectual workers should get in close touch with realities, base themselves on careful investigations and surveys supplying correct data and documents, to draw out scientific conclusions. The results of research and inventions should be quickly applied to the practice to serve the people's life, and should be largely disseminated through different means or the mass-media: newspapers, reviews, books, radio, and television.

Scientific research at present requires an *interbranch cooperation*. A given research project often needs the cooperation between scientists working in various fields: natural sciences, technical sciences, social sciences, those engaged in studies of historical problems, and those engaged in studies of present problems, intellectuals engaged in cultural, literary, artistic creation, and experts of precision sciences.

Therefore intellectuals should have deep knowledge of their specialty. At the same time, they should have broader knowledge of the related fields in order to well carry out interbranch research work.

In short, in the market mechanism, female intellectuals have *more favourable conditions* to bring into play their abilities and talent, to improve their knowledge and to earn higher income with their intellectual labour. However, new requirements are severe. Scientists should have deep knowledge of their special branch and broad general knowledge; and they should know foreign languages.

Many women have strived to well perform their duties, winning the confidence and respect of the community. But not few women are facing *difficulties and deadlocks*.

Firstly, there are general weak points of women. Due to the influence of the old attitude "respecting men and despising women", many women—even they already are scientists, high-level intellectuals, still have the *inferiority complex*, submissive to their fate, remain passive in their work. This limits their independent thinking, their creative mind, their abilities

in making discoveries and inventions. This is the inside force that blocks the way to progress of female intellectuals.

According to the surveys carried out by the Vietnam Women's Union Central Executive Committee in February 1992, many female scientists evaluated the main limitations of women in scientific and social activities: vacillating attitude: 55.95%; subjective and conservative attitude: 38.9%; lack of perseverance: 21.83%; preventing each other: 20.63%; inferiority complex, depending on other people: 14.3%.

We recognize that in general at present, female scientists have more weak points in comparison with their male colleagues, concerning knowledge, foreign languages, the ability to grasp modern information, independent thinking and creativeness. Those limitations and shortcomings of female scientists are consequences of many historical and social factors affecting women in general (some factors still retain their effect), but they are not inborn or invariable. It is very wrong to think that intellectual labour, abstract thinking and generalization are always strong points of man.

Another cause we should note here is the heavy burden of *the housework and childcare* that female scientists should shoulder, although in many cases they are assisted by their husbands.

The latest surveys show that female intellectuals, teachers, scientists, and employees are in charge of 60% to 70% of household maintenance activities, which take much time and efforts from them.

The contradiction between scientific work and housework still remain for many women, especially young women having small babies.

Traditionally, Vietnamese women including scientists and in general intellectuals, show affection for their family. They are ready to make sacrifices for their children and husbands. Sometimes, they even sacrifice their scientific cause for the protection of family happiness. But those women cannot find complete happiness since they always regret that they left their scientific cause unfinished. And only women who know how to arrange family affairs, to mobilize their husband and children to help them in

housework, can continue their cause successfully, and can find real happiness for themselves and their family.

At present, there are new favourable conditions. In general the living conditions of female scientists have been improved. They have better accommodation, facilities, and means of information. The development of services helps them to do shopping, cooking, washing clothes more easily and quickly than before.

According to world opinion, the best period of creation for people working in natural sciences is from 25 years old to 35 years old. However, for Vietnamese female scientists, working in natural sciences or technical sciences, when they are young, newly married and having small babies, it is difficult for them to concentrate on scientific work and effective research. Women aged 35-40 years old upwards usually have more conditions to work well, since their children have grown up, and they can concentrate their efforts on their jobs. However, being middle-aged women, they can not retain the same acumen or the same good memory as before. Therefore female intellectuals suffer more losses than their male colleagues. For each of their achievements, each of their creations, female intellectuals must make more efforts than male intellectuals.

Hence, although they work in different economic branches, female intellectuals have the same wish: to have *better conditions and opportunities for work*, for bringing into play their intelligence, abilities and talent to serve the cause of national construction. The State should then have policies to help female intellectuals develop their creative abilities and work in the branch matching their qualification.

Vietnam has already had a Labour Code with many important articles concerning workers in all occupations and branches, in which there is a special chapter on female workers. The Vietnamese Party and State have also laid down particular policies and regulations for male and female workers in each branch. For the contingent of intellectuals working in different ministries, and branches, at the central and local levels, there have also been concrete regulations.

However, concerning the training and use of female intellectuals we want to make the following suggestions:

1. The scale of training of students in general, of female students in particular, for different occupations, should be kept in accordance with the need for female workforce of different ministries and branches in each specific period of time. Attention should be paid to the needs for development of important branches. In the content of training, theories should be linked with practice; foreign languages, informatics, and interbranch knowledge should be taught in order to help students get jobs close to their specialty.

2. Intellectuals should receive *proper wages*, not in priority like the members of the army and security forces, but not too low. Intellectuals should be able to earn their living with intellectual labour in the branch they have been trained in, without having to leave their profession, or to do extra-jobs contrary to their qualification.

3. To encourage university graduates and young cadres to work in *far remote rural areas*, the State should have special policies of remuneration and training (subsidy for those who work in difficult areas; determination of the working term after which they can move to another region; regulation on training those workers to improve their knowledge).

4. For the contingent of female intellectuals in general, especially for young women graduates from universities, and particularly able women, conditions should be created for their further studies, helping them to attend *post-university* courses, to pass post-graduate examinations, and to write their doctor's thesis. We should not forget that women always face more difficulties and obstacles than men, concerning the conditions and opportunities for learning.

5. *Retirement age*: for the contingent of female intellectuals and scientific experts, the State should determine clearly the retirement age of women (60 years old) like men. Senior female experts able to make more contributions to their special branch are allowed to continue their work

after the age of 60, like men. Regarding leadership and management, the State should decide that all men and women aged 60 years old must hand over their function to younger cadres.

6. In our country there is at present a very small contingent of *senior female experts*, professors, and doctors.

The Party and State should pay attention to creating for them favourable working conditions, providing them with information, books, newspapers, allowing them to participate in scientific seminars in the country and abroad. Contributions of senior female experts should be evaluated properly, praised and rewarded in time. Over the last years, the State awarded the Hồ Chí Minh prize to 70 scientists, but it is regrettable that among them there was no woman. This is unjust and reflects the lack of gender equality in science.

Ending Chapter II by analysing the situation of female intellectuals, we would like to stress that workers, peasants, and intellectuals are three fundamental components of the Vietnamese workforce, the foundation of the Vietnamese political system. With progress of humankind in the 21st century, with the development of the knowledge-based economy, intellectual labour will control productive, business, and socio-cultural activities of the whole world and affect Vietnam profoundly. Therefore, to train, foster, care for intellectuals in general, female intellectuals in particular, is not a special favour reserved for this social stratum; it is for the common interest of the country.

Coming from families of workers, peasants, employees, or self-employed people, the contingent of Vietnamese intellectuals is developing, becoming the *key factor* for pushing up the country's economy and culture to advance and achieve outstanding progress, liberating large masses of working people from hard strenuous jobs, creating high labour productivity, increasing incomes, improving rapidly the living conditions of families, and contributing to the realization of social justice, happiness, progress and civilization in our country.

CHAPTER III

WOMEN MAKING EFFORTS TO ADVANCE AND TO ACHIEVE MASTERSHIP OVER SOCIETY, AND GENDER RESPONSIVE POLICIES

I. WOMEN MAKING EFFORTS TO ADVANCE, TO ACHIEVE MASTERSHIP OVER SOCIETY WITH THEIR OWN POTENTIAL- ITIES, AND TO BRING INTO PLAY THE HISTORICAL TRADITIONS IN THE NEW EPOCH

The 8th Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party underlined the main task of the whole Vietnamese people to "continue the cause for Renovation, push up the industrialization and modernization of the country, for the purpose of making the people prosperous, the country strong, society just and civilized, and advancing firmly to socialism."

This great task is fulfilled in the context of the world entering *the 21st century*, a century full of turbulence with many advanced scientific, technical, technological achievements, and the post-industrial civilization, in which intellectual labour will replace simple, manual labour in many fields of social activities.

We have already set up a sound strategy of action and gained many favourable objective conditions. But the decisive factor is to have qualified people to meet the requirements of the industrialization and modernization of the country. Such requirements concern not only the abilities, educational level, moral qualities of the worker but also proper health conditions, sentiments, conceptions and mood. We do not demand a unique

model of worker, irreproachable people who are totally similar to one another. But we need diversified concrete workers having different peculiarities, talents and professional knowledge, meeting the requirements of work in different circumstances and conditions.

The country needs good experts on economic, military, political, cultural, educational, and medical fields, wise managers, talented entrepreneurs, as well as scientists with a practical and creative mode of thinking.

At the same time, the country needs large masses of ordinary workers, with professional conscience, certain educational standard, professional level and abilities to cope in time with changes in production and professional activities.

The country also needs outstanding artists, writers, poets, cultural workers, etc., meeting the people's need for enjoyment of cultural products, their internal life, their sentiments, their ideology, preserving and developing the fine features of Vietnamese culture.

In the context of a changing world, Vietnamese society is continuously renovating. Vietnamese workers of both sexes not only have to work diligently and perseveringly, but they must be *intelligent, and sensible of the new*. Workers have to learn many new things, *to be dynamic and resourceful* to cope with changing situations, *to think independently*, to bring into play their own intellectual ability, *to decide on* and to take responsibility for their work.

All working people have to meet the above requirements, at different levels, depending on their concrete jobs, occupations, social positions. However women have special characteristics, due to their reproductive function, and their heavy responsibility in child care and education, in household maintenance activities.

So, women are shouldering three responsibilities: production and participation in society's management; giving birth to children and caring for them; and taking care of the family. Their working, learning and living

are more difficult than those of men. How should they strive to achieve mastership over the Renovation process of the country and what does mastery mean?

Mastery means one's *responsibility, right and interest* in the realization of the cause of Renovation. Those who exercise their mastership *act consciously*, take the initiative in work; they are active and *decide themselves* on their work. Female workers, therefore, must not only have a sense of *responsibility* but they must have also the capacity to make right decisions, and must have necessary *conditions and opportunities* to realize the latter.

It is not easy to achieve mastership over one's fate, over one's life in the family and in society. Many women have mentioned the *objective factors* that bring about losses for them, making more difficult their struggle to achieve mastership over the new society. They need many things as follows:

- *High knowledge level* or complete vocational training, knowledge level including educational level, profound knowledge of a special domain, and broad diversified knowledge of related branches, knowledge of foreign languages, etc.

- *Favourable working and learning conditions*; the concerned organs' attention to women's education, training, promotion, assignment of jobs suitable for women's abilities.

- *Reduction of housework* so that women can have time to study and do better their jobs.

- *Stability in the family*, sympathy and understanding of the husband, children, parents, which create favourable conditions for their work; making them to feel at ease and have sentimental, psychological equilibrium.

- *The economic potentiality* of women and their families; the stability of jobs and incomes of the husband and wife; the assistance of parents and relatives when necessary.

However, the *subjective efforts* of women are very important and constitute *the decisive factor*. Many disadvantaged women, some of them facing particularly difficult circumstances, have striven to overcome difficulties, make progress, and fulfil remarkably their tasks.

In Vietnamese society at present, we find not a few good female experts in the medical, cultural, educational and scientific fields; capable female entrepreneurs well managing large enterprises and companies; female leading cadres at different economic branches, different levels of the administration who work effectively and enjoy people's respect; and talented female artists admired by the masses. They are at the same time wives and mothers, striving to well care for their family. Together with them, a great number of ordinary working women have achieved mastery over production and managed well their family affairs.

Those women, in general, have no more favourable conditions than other women. Their successes depend mainly on *their own efforts*. They work hard, investing their intelligence and efforts in the job, overcoming their own weak points, exploiting the present favourable conditions, striving to advance to achieve mastery over their work and contribute actively to social development. They often have temporary failures due to lack of experience. But they are not discouraged and continue their work with a greater determination.

With love and responsibility, they overcome difficulties to build a happy family, consolidating their "home front". What lessons can be drawn from the struggle of those women? We can outline the following common points:

1. *They are eager to learn*. They perseveringly surmount obstacles to improve their educational standard, their diversified knowledge; they pay attention to grasping *information* through their social relations, through books, newspapers, and other means of the mass media. They are sensitive to *new, progressive things*, in pair with a *practical mind*, not having only impulsive acts or a dogmatic mode of thinking.

This is a difficult problem for women, when they are flooded with lots of tasks in the office or enterprise, and in the family. They have little time for study, few opportunities to attend training courses, very limited social relations in comparison with men. Women then have difficulties in generalizing things and have the tendency to think in an impulsive and concrete way.

2. Successful women know to *arrange in a scientific way their work* including professional occupations and family affairs. This helps them to overcome many difficulties, to avoid embarrassment and passivity. They have long-term and short-term working plans, setting in order productive work and housework, and have then time for rest and for study to improve continuously their knowledge.

To work in a scientific way is difficult for women who usually work at haphazard, doing what they are seeing, without plans to ensure the first priorities. They are often attracted by sudden jobs, trifling jobs in the family, let unimportant things occupy their mind, and forget the main problems.

3. To *think independently*, and bring into play their *creative mind*, is very important for women. Women are often praised for their sense of discipline, implementing well the regulations already promulgated. But their weak point lies in independent thinking, creative mind, new ideas, and boldness in presenting their opinions. Women have to surmount the tendency to think and work in a passive way, to speak and act in the wake of others. To listen to other people's opinions, to exchange ideas and experiences with their colleagues and friends, to assimilate the new, correct ideas is useful and necessary. But this does not mean to imitate all other people's acts, since each individual has particular circumstances, and things happen in different conditions. Instead of automatically imitating other people, women should analyse the right and wrong sides of each measure, each action, and utilize other people's experiences in a creative way.

4. Working diligently and perseveringly is often a strong point of women. But women must also make *creations*, improving continuously their working process. At present, many women are working with old experiences, and following old habits. This is a weak point they should overcome. Women should bring into play the strength of their *intelligence* to reduce the labour intensity, increase the productivity, the effectiveness of their work step by step. Not everybody can make great inventions, but small initiatives can have important effects on the improvement of the quality of labour.

5. An important factor is the *self-confidence* of women, who rely on their own abilities, *deciding themselves* on their work in an active way, daring to take upon themselves the *responsibility* for their decisions. The weak point of many women now is the lack of self-confidence, or timidity preventing them from presenting their own opinions, and from discussing frankly with men, since they are thinking that their knowledge level is inferior to that of men. This is due to the influence of the prejudice "respecting men and despising women" which has long existed in the Vietnamese history, making people believe that women are inferior to men, especially in the intellectual regard.

Family education through many generations, in pair with behaviour of society's members, create for women the complex of inferiority, lack of confidence in their own abilities. We need them to *make women change the psychology and way of thinking*; at the same time they must change the behaviour, the way of thinking of society's members, especially men, who usually underestimate the capacity of women. The boldness of women who strive to make progress should be encouraged and supported by society, the State and the family.

6. It is necessary to build a *quick, energetic, and resourceful style of work*, a style suitable for an industrial society and for an epoch full of quick and continuous changes. Women should get rid of the slow style of work, the habit to work at random, to do what they see. They should build a *scientific style of work*, making in time clear, definite decisions, basing on serious studies and investigations, quick and calm examination of the problems.



Medical workers at the convalescent ward of Vietnam-Sweden Hospital in Uông Bí, Quảng Ninh Province. This is a health care establishment awarded the title "Hero of labour."

Photo: Thu Hoài, Vietnam News Agency

7. Women have to fulfil heavy tasks in society and the family. A very important factor is to achieve *mastership over their own families*. The building of a stable, happy family, in which there is equality between spouses who love and help each other, bringing up good children who work well at school, who respect and esteem their parents and relatives, is a basic factor, a spiritual sentimental source of strength, helping women to have more determination and confidence to fulfil the tasks assigned to them by society.

In the life of a person, different events may take place, joyful and sad, encouraging and annoying. Women should keep for themselves the *psychological spiritual equilibrium*, and the calm, easy inner feelings. They should not be distressed or angry without reason or with insignificant causes, damaging their family happiness and their relations with friends and relatives.

Women should preserve the beauty of both their inner feelings and their appearance. The beauty of soul, grace and charm in the manner of speaking and in behaviour are necessary for women, if they want to achieve success in social activities as well as in family life, building true happiness for themselves.

II. DESIGNING SOCIO-ECONOMIC POLICIES ON GENDER EQUALITY

Efforts made by women to advance are not separated from the support of the State, its appropriate policies and measures, as well as from the encouragement of public opinion through the mass media, the practical assistance of mass organizations, friends, colleagues and family members.

1. Effect of the new State policies on women and the family

In recent years, the Vietnamese State has implemented a series of very important socio-economic policies. So, how is the socio-economic effect

of those policies on different strata of the population, especially on women and the family?

The aim of the new *economic policies* is to push up economic growth on the basis of employment generation for the population, increase of labour productivity, economic effectiveness, and incomes for the working people. Thanks to this, the sources of social material welfare will increase, creating prosperity for the whole community.

The aim of the *social policies* is to push up progress in the cultural, political and social fields, meeting the intellectual, spiritual, and sentimental needs of the population, including the need for exchange of social information, through the promotion of democratic activities, freedom and equality, the increase of public welfare in health care, culture, education and postal services.

Humans constitute the motive force for the implementation of socio-economic policies. At the same time, those policies are closely connected, have different particular tasks that support each other in service of the development of humans and community.

The new economic policies include the long-term allotment of land for production to peasant households, the all-round development of the rural economy; the encouragement of development of different economic sectors, development of the commodity economy and the market mechanism; the renovation of the economic management mechanism, the application of advanced technologies to production, etc. They have created *conditions and opportunities for individuals and families* to have more jobs and increase clearly their incomes. Generally speaking, those policies are of *active significance* paving the way for overcoming step by step the economic crisis that lasted for many years in Vietnam.

But this active socio-economic effect is not the same for everybody, in every circumstance.

Each individual, each family and each social stratum, have particular difficulties and favourable conditions in the reception and implementation

of new economic policies. Therefore, a number of individuals and families have quickly made a fortune as they have capital, labour force, favourable material bases and business management knowledge. A number of other individuals and families (especially families headed by single women, families of war invalids, and martyrs) have unfavourable objective conditions or weak subjective conditions, and thus cannot improve their life. Some even become poorer. So the differentiation between the rich and the poor has become more visible in society.

On the other hand, a number of policies implemented have pushed up the general economic growth. At the same time, they have brought about negative consequences in the social field.

Therefore, social policies have the role to regulate equal and unequal relations between different families, social groups, having different incomes, structures of consumption, health care, educational and cultural enjoyment, etc.

Social policies strive to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor, not by limiting those who know to carry out business and make a fortune with legal means, but by creating conditions and opportunities for everybody to get access to new economic policies, to work effectively and increase their incomes. Special attention should be paid to the poor and those who suffer difficult circumstances or many losses (women, ethnic minority people, families of war invalids and martyrs, etc.). Different groups and social strata have different social positions. They participate at different levels in the economic, political and social life. Therefore, it is necessary to have social policies to regulate properly various relations, and ensure the equal rights of all citizens to achieving mastership over society. Besides it is very necessary to increase public welfare, so that everybody, rich and poor, men and women, can have access to health care, education and cultural products.

Hence, social policies are aimed at ensuring the *harmony between individuals' interests and the community's interests*, the wealth and happiness

of individuals and the progress of the whole society, bringing about *necessary social justice* suitable for each historical epoch, helping those who are in unfavourable conditions and who are suffering the greatest losses to have opportunities to make progress, to learn, to work and live as normal people. Those are factors necessary for the stable and solid development of society, for the building of Vietnam into a prosperous and happy country.

Vietnamese women, with their productive and reproductive functions, form a basic labour force of society and a pillar of the family. The Vietnamese Constitution since 1945 has promulgated gender equality. However, even now women still suffer many losses and face many unfavourable conditions in their life. Women are basic objects of Vietnamese social policies in this period of Renovation.

As we have considered in Chapter II, in the development of the individual, private economic sector in rural as well as in urban areas, women's labour has been mobilized to the maximum to build the household economy and make a fortune.

Women have different occupations to increase the family's incomes, while they have the function to give birth to children, to take care of them, and to do housework. The increase of family incomes is often based on the prolongation of women's working time and the increase of women's labour intensity.

In the market mechanism, wage-earning women experience many pressures and suffer many losses in comparison with men in the labour market. Meanwhile, the decrease of public welfare, of free educational, cultural, and medical services affects badly the life and health of women and children. Women are always linked with their children and family. Policies concerning the family, family planning, childcare, etc., directly influence women.

How Vietnamese social policies should pay attention to women and their families, especially to labour, employment and enjoyment of social welfare?

2. Justice and equality between men and women in employment in the present market mechanism

The Vietnamese Constitution and many State laws and policies underline gender equality in all fields, including gender equality in employment (recruitment, formation and training, remuneration, etc.). However, the concept of *equality* and the concept of *social justice* are not totally the same. They have different contents and they complement each other.

Gender equality is based on the principle: men and women have equal rights and responsibilities in the family and society, in all economic, political and cultural activities. But gender equality does not mean the same treatment for men and for women, in employment, in education and in the family. For men and women have different conditions, circumstances, opportunities, and different starting points.

To apply the *same treatment* to men and women in a mechanical way will lead to *injustice* for women. In the creation of jobs for men and women, the principles of equality and justice should be linked closely to each other.

To pay attention to creating jobs for both genders is an expression of gender equality. But women have particular conditions and circumstances, more difficult than those of men (due to their reproductive function, their responsibility in child care and household maintenance activities). So social justice requires the creation of *more favourable conditions* for women, so that they can enjoy equality in employment with men. Here, the "discrimination" is necessary to ensure justice and equality between the two sexes.

For instance, in *education and training* to set up the same conditions for men and for women will lead to injustice for women, when they must take care of family affairs and childcare. Instead, more favourable opportunities different from those for men, should be created for women.

Women cannot go far from home during a long period. They cannot always learn in the evening. Therefore, in the organization of training

courses, the choice of places, and learning time, etc., attention should be paid to the demand of women. Women have good conditions for learning when they have not yet children, and when their children have grown up. So in those periods, priority should be given to women to participate in long-term training courses suitable for them.

The *improvement of women's educational and professional levels* is a strategic measure to improve the quality of their labour, allowing women to get in touch with new technical and technological advances that are being brought into our country. The formation of good, young female intellectuals and experts requires special investment. Attention should be paid to capable women. Special training plans should be implemented in time for them, not confined only to regular classes like those for men.

This is not for the only interests of women. This is to bring into play the female labour force accounting for 51% of the total Vietnamese workforce, and to serve the Renovation cause.

3. How to build social policies from the gender approach viewpoint?

a) Social policies firstly are *common policies for both genders*, in the context of general development programmes, ensuring justice and equality in rights and duties, creating jobs, increasing incomes, alleviating poverty, increasing the power and raising the position of the population, including men and women.

Even when we have already common policies, if we do not pay attention to women, those policies will be only to men's advantage. Special policies for women are necessary. But if those policies are separated from common ones, it will be very difficult to implement them, and they will become disadvantageous for women.

For instance, in the common social development programme to realize the objectives of job creation, income increase and poverty alleviation, we should make clear what should be done for men and what should be done

for women, with particular characteristics of each gender. Male and female genders have different strong points and weak points, different abilities, health conditions and different responsibilities in reproduction. So we should think over what policies are needed, what conditions and opportunities should be created so that both genders can bring into full play their potentialities and support each other, to realize the target of the development programme.

From the gender approach, we should ensure the right to equality of both sexes, in the participation in all economic, political, cultural, and social activities, in the enjoyment of their achievements, in the creation of power and improvement of economic, political, social positions for them, in the family and in society.

However, attention should be paid to the following facts:

- Women at present work a lot, but enjoy few interests;
- Women work a lot but they have not the right to decide on the work;
- Women contribute to production and reproduction, but their position in the family and in society is low.

Therefore, the problem is not only to promulgate the right to equality, but *to have policies and measures to ensure* the implementation of this right in reality. The social groups that are in unfavourable positions, that have no easy conditions and opportunities to realize their right to equality, should receive special assistance. Women in general, single women who are household heads, invalid women, women members of families of war invalids and martyrs should receive appropriate support.

b) On the basis of ensuring the right to equality of both genders in development, the *policies supporting women* should be worked out in order to help women to have abilities and conditions to catch up with the common pace of development.

The improvement of the work's effectiveness, the increase of incomes, and the improvement of working conditions for women should be linked with the policy on training to raise women's knowledge and professional level, redistribution of labour between men and women, the application of new technologies helping women get in touch with new high-income occupations, the creation of conditions for women to borrow funds and use means of production on an equal footing with men.

The *reduction of labour intensity and working time for women*, the increase of women's enjoyment of cultural products and the rest time are not separated from the development of services and public welfare concerning health care, education, culture, etc. At the same time, this is not separated from the distribution of labour in the family, between the wife and the husband who share with each other the burden of housework and childcare.

Policies concerning *women* are linked with those concerning the *family*, with childcare and education provided by the State.

c) An important thing is that social policies should have a *positive character*, since relief programmes, activities for saving people from misfortune are only temporary measures for women and families in particularly ill-fated circumstances. While positive social policies do not make female workers to become beggars for help. Female workers themselves should strive to seize the favourable opportunities and conditions to organize production, to improve the living conditions of themselves and their families, to assert their equal position and role in the family and in society. Not any social policy can help lazy people who only wait for help and rely on the labour of other people. To struggle against poverty, to increase the effectiveness of women's work, increase their income, to create power for them and raise their status is the affair of female workers themselves who should make efforts, use their strength and intelligence to achieve success. Social policies are the legal basis, necessary material and spiritual support for them to realize the common development objectives.

4. A number of important policies meeting the needs and interests of female workers

In Chapter II, analyzing the working conditions of different strata of women: workers, peasants, and intellectuals, we have pointed out a number of concrete policies, necessary for each stratum of women. Here we would like to underline some important State policies that are, at the same time, the contents of *very basic strategies for action*. They are strategies for health care, educational, cultural development, strategy for population, strategy for the environment and sustainable development of the country. The implementation of those strategies has a great effect on the large masses of working women, meeting their needs, wishes and interests.

a) To complete the programme for *eradicating illiteracy* among the people in working age, to universalize primary education, to increase the percentage of students of the secondary level, and university level, in order to build a young generation, especially a contingent of young women, having a high level of knowledge necessary for the scientific and technological revolution in the 21st century.

People often say that employment and the need of production can push up study and the improvement of workers' scientific technical level. But this cannot occur spontaneously. This requires from the State suitable *social, educational and cultural policies*.

Firstly, up to the year 2000, the State should invest funds and efforts to *complete the programme for illiteracy eradication* among the working-age population, with special attention to be paid to women and ethnic minority groups. The endeavour to universalize the *primary level of education* should be carried out. The *number of students of secondary education should be increased, in which the percentage of women should be raised to 50%*. This will create the basis for increasing the percentage of female university students, from 37% at present to 50%.

The State and community should have measures to encourage families to let their children go to school until they finish each educational

level, have policies to support poor children, provide them with scholarships. Communities, villages and precincts can raise funds for poor pupils. Children who do well at school, should be praised and rewarded in time. Excellent pupils should be allowed to move from one level to another level of education, including to enter universities without the need to undergo examinations. Scholarships from foreign countries can be distributed to good students and poor gifted students.

In solving the above problems, *priority should be given to children of rural, mountainous and remote areas and girl pupils*. Attention should be paid to ensuring the percentage of women at least 45%.

b) To raise the level of enjoyment of cultural products of women in the whole country

For women, in productive activities and in family life, the *cultural factor* plays a very important role.

Activities of humans are regulated by both material and spiritual interests. Humans have not only material life but also *intellectual, sentimental, spiritual life*, which is very important, especially for women. Women's needs for enjoyment of cultural and artistic products, beliefs and religions, social relations and family happiness can not be ignored. It is necessary to meet those needs to give more strength to women so that they can continue their busy work.

Labour productivity and effectiveness of work are influenced by the worker's cultural, scientific, technical, and professional levels. At the same time, workers are under the regulation of *material and spiritual individual interests*, and of individual desire in work. Culture and arts are mental food necessary for human life.

At present, women are the population who have the *lowest level of enjoyment of cultural products*. This deprives them of conditions and opportunities to improve their intellectual abilities and aesthetic taste. To reduce stress in women's working life, to create necessary psychological

equilibrium and peace of mind, women should enjoy artistic performances, which help them to improve their personality and morality, and at the same time, well educate their children and build family happiness.

The problem now is that many poor families cannot afford to purchase communication facilities such as television, or radio sets. In communes, the few newspapers and reviews purchased with public funds are mainly read by cadres of the administration and do not reach ordinary villagers. Sometimes, when artistic performances or film shows are given in communes and villages, only men and children can come to see whereas women usually stay home to care for small babies and housework.

Therefore, to *diffuse broadly various forms of culture and information* among the rural population (accounting for 80% of the total population of the country), especially rural women, it is necessary to have investments from the State.

Efforts should be concentrated firstly on the establishment of *public radio and loudspeaker systems* in poor and mountainous areas. It is necessary to provide training for the *contingent of disseminators*, to control regularly their work, and give them monthly allowances. In the present circumstances, loudspeakers and disseminators are effective means to diffuse information, knowledge, cultural and artistic works to the population. (In ethnic minority areas, local languages can be used easily).

In communes with a higher cultural level, the population should be mobilized to establish *local libraries*, where families, children and adults can come to read and borrow books. When lectures, film shows, and artistic performances are given in communes, *conditions should be created for women to participate in them*, and this must be considered a criterion of "cultural family" or "cultural village."

When women have a higher cultural level, their need for enjoyment of cultural products also increases. This requires changes from two aspects:

- Attention paid by the State to the creation of conditions for women to get in touch with different products of culture, arts and information.

- Efforts of women themselves to arrange their work and their spending, in order to have time and money for participation in cultural activities, and to meet their cultural needs.

The *cultural and educational factors* are the key for working women to involve in creative activities full of pleasure, reducing the strenuousness of work, creating high labour productivity, and economic effectiveness. Thereby, women have much time for rest and recreation, for childcare and family affairs.

c) Support for women in childcare, family affairs, and implementation of the population and family planning strategy

Women are suffering the heaviest consequences of the rapid population growth. Until now, women have shouldered the main responsibilities in childcare, care for old people and sick people in the family. They always have to find more jobs to increase their family incomes and ensure the life of their children. They show concern for the decrease of the birth rate and reduction of population growth. But they face many obstacles that need to be removed.

c1- Firstly, this is the influence of the old backward mode of thinking ("respecting men and despising women") leading to the decision of families, especially in rural areas, to have by all means *at least one son to carry on the lineage*. In many cases, the husband or husband's family forces the wife to give birth to the third, fourth, or fifth child in the hope to have finally one son. Otherwise, the husband can threaten to abandon the wife if she gives birth only to daughters. So, many wives although reluctantly and in poor health, must continue to give birth to new babies, after having already many children.

c2- Secondly, during many years, the campaign for family planning only concentrated on women. Despite some recent rectifications, *women*

still account for a very high percentage of people using different contraceptive means. A great number of men refuse to take family planning measures. Some of them even forbid their wife to use contraceptive means. They tend to let women get pregnant, and then use abortion. So a number of women have two or three abortions a year, which affects their health.

c3- Therefore, it is necessary to have the *policy of gender equality* in the implementation of the population strategy in our country. The State should have a clear policy on the rights and responsibilities of the male and female genders in the population problem (official legal documents should be promulgated).

Both genders, both wife and husband have the same rights and responsibilities in the implementation of family planning, reduction of birth rate, applying together various contraceptive measures (spouses should discuss with each other and decide on the use of suitable means in accordance with the health condition of the wife and of the husband), and giving birth only to two children. Active measures should be taken to reduce maternal mortality rate and infant mortality rate, to ensure for newly-born children good health and conditions for physical and intellectual development.

The woman has the right to decide on the number of her children, on the time of their birth, and she has the right to sterilization when necessary. She should discuss the problem with her husband. But the latter has not the right to final decision. Since all the burden is shouldered by the wife (childbirth, childcare, the danger of maternal mortality), it is reasonable that *the wife should have the right to final decision*.

c4 - The population strategy should go in pair with the *improvement of the quality of life of population, especially women and children*

The State should pay attention to, and invest in *primary health care* for the whole population particularly for women and children, to ensure good health for mother and children, so that all families can accept to have each only two children.

Attention should be paid to the improvement of *childcare knowledge and skills for mothers* by the State and different mass organizations.

Women are responsible for the nurture of children, especially babies of 0 to 5 years old, contributing an important part to the increase or decrease of infant mortality rates (a factor affecting the decision of families to have only two children). Women are those who transmit national culture to children, helping the formation of children's personality in the first years of life. Therefore, the mother's knowledge is a decisive factor for the health and development of children, in the physical, intellectual and mental aspects.

However, at present, many young mothers lack necessary knowledge and skills for the nurture of small babies (feeding regime, treatment of common diseases, etc.) Meanwhile, a number of old women cling to old backward experiences in guiding their daughters and daughters-in-law, and oppose scientific methods of childcare.

Therefore, the nurture of small babies to reduce infant mortality rates (a factor influencing directly the decrease of birth rates) depends on the abilities, knowledge and time reserved by mothers for childcare. Here, once again, all responsibilities cannot be placed totally on women. We should consider also the *responsibility of the husband* and of other family members in housework and childcare, who should share the burden with the wife. At the same time, the support from the State and the community has also a great significance.

d) The development of State and private medical services, nurseries, and infant schools influences directly the life of women and children

With a continuous population growth and a national economy still not yet developed, the State budget reserved for medical and educational welfare is very limited (accounting for only 4% of the total budget in 1990, and increasing to 13% in 1998). People can have access to medical check-up in State hospitals and medical stations. But they must pay for medicines and hospital fees. There are many private pharmacies, which

sell expensive and sometimes false medicines. For many families, having a member seriously ill needing to be hospitalized, is in fact a disaster. Poor families having many sick children must borrow money continuously and often cannot get rid of debts during many following years. The care for sick people in the family is usually the responsibility of women who must strive to work to have means to pay the debts.

At present, due to poverty, many women only use medicinal plants grown in their garden to try to treat diseases. Besides, a number of them go to pagodas and temples to pray to deities for help in curing their diseases.

Concerning the *State policies on maternity leave*, leave of mothers caring for sick children, the regulations for State workers and employees are clear, concrete and in general, well implemented. However, in private enterprises, the implementation is not always proper. In case of rural women and women working in the non-formal sector, there is not any special health care policy, except the common regime for the whole population.

In 1994, in the whole country, 600 communes had no communal medical station and 3,000 communes had no midwife. Hence, the State should invest in health care, to ensure the establishment of at least one medical station for each commune and provide one midwife to care for women in childbirth. This is a basic policy for rural women, especially in mountainous remote areas.

In communal medical stations and district hospitals serving rural population, those who come for treatment of diseases, particularly women and children, should be *exempted from hospital fees* and receive free medicines during a number of days (depending on the patient's condition), *especially in case of emergency*.

The population is now urged to buy medical insurance policies. But since there are still many poor families in rural areas, it is necessary to have a policy of free medical examination and disease treatment for rural people, particularly women in childbirth, and small children. At present, a

number of poor families, families of war invalids and martyrs, etc., are exempted from hospital fees, but they have to complete complicated formalities with the communal administration, and this creates obstacles when they have to care for family members needing urgent treatment.

Another fact is the *decrease of the number of nurseries and infant schools* that affects badly women and children. Without State subsidies like in the past, the system of nurseries and infant schools has been curtailed. The number of children attending these establishments has much decreased. In 1991 and 1992, only 13% of children attended nurseries and infant schools. In rural areas, very few children go to private nurseries and infant schools. Most of them stay at home, cared for by older children or, fortunately, by their old grandparents. In localities where there are many ponds and lakes, accidents occur yearly: small children fall into the water and drown when their parents work far from home.

Families and the community show great concern about childcare to ensure their safety and good health, their intellectual, and mental development.

Generally speaking, the very limited State expenditures on public medical, educational, and cultural welfare in the context of a rapid population growth are affecting the life of all people. But women, children, and poor families are suffering the most.

e) Environmental protection

At present, two-thirds of the Vietnamese population earn their living by exploiting directly natural resources: land, forests, pools, lakes and the sea. Due to the high speed of population growth, and the lax economic management, the natural resources per capita are decreasing. The environment is polluted seriously. The consequences of forest destruction, of too rapid population growth, of urbanization and industrialization are creating serious social problems. The environment, the working and living conditions of the population are unhealthy, affecting badly the health of women and children.

The policy for sustainable development of the Vietnamese State is to push up the process of industrialization and modernization of the country, focusing on agriculture and rural areas, in pair with the rational exploitation of natural resources (land, forests, water, minerals), the protection of the ecosystem, the struggle against deterioration and exhaustion of natural resources, against the pollution of the living environment (land, water, air) and the pollution of the social environment.

The sustainable development is linked with the resolution of different problems concerning the *natural environment, the social environment and the human environment*. Humans are members of the universe and of society. With a good behaviour, in harmony with the nature and the society, humans can build comfortable life for themselves, and establish solid communities, living in harmony and developing sustainably. Lack of harmony between humans, nature and society will smash up the durable existence of all of them.

A very urgent requirement for each individual, each family and each community now is the *cleaning and improvement of the environment*: rational use of water sources, hygienic way of life, cleanliness and order of houses, villages, good relations between different members of the family, who respect and love each other, friendly relations between neighbouring families supporting each other.

Building "*cultural families*" is meeting the above basic requirements, shaping the civilized way of life, oriented to a living environment having a deep human character.

At the same time, the *active participation of communities*, villages, communes, precincts, and quarters is necessary. The administration and such mass organizations as women's union, youth unions, farmers' associations should mobilize the population in the building of the three hygienic facilities: bathroom, well and septic tank. Interest-free loans can be provided for families to build the above facilities, especially in rural regions.

Communities, villages, communes and residential quarters should organize regularly the control of environmental protection and hygienic measures in residential quarters, working places, roads, and markets. Competitions can be organized to encourage "families preserving the civilized way of life or cultural families."

Local administrations should reserve some part of their budget and call upon the population to contribute to the building of clean and large roads, hygienic draining systems to protect the living environment for the whole community.

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In general, the results of the implementation of the above policies, which will affect profoundly the life of women and their families, do not depend only on the concern and investment of the State. The important thing is the *close cooperation* between three forces that support each other in their positive activities: *The State medical, educational, and cultural system; the community system* (village, commune, precinct, quarter), and *inhabitants* themselves, particularly *women* who regularly care for family affairs, for the health of children, old people and other family members, who give birth to children and nurse small babies. Here we return to the gender approach. The husband must share the burden of housework and childcare with the wife, so that she can fulfil well her tasks as a citizen, as a wife and mother.

CONCLUSIONS

Vietnam is now experiencing all-round changes in the economical, cultural, social fields, which affect profoundly the life of all social strata, all individuals and all families.

The *positive effects* of the Renovation process are very clear: the population's living standard has been improved, people feel free and at ease in work and in life. The broadening of relations inside and outside the country with the modern mass-media help to broaden the people's vision of the world. They can analyse the right and the wrong, and learn new experiences in order to integrate themselves into the world, without losing their national identity.

At the same time, the *negative effects* of the market mechanism have been revealed clearly: production of fake goods, bad quality products, illegal means to make profits, pitiless exploitation of women's and children's labour, corruption, bribery, increasing social evils, etc.

The strategy for action of the Vietnamese Party and State at present aims to develop the positive points, prevent the negative effects and dangers, striving to build Vietnam into a "prosperous people, a strong country, a just and civilized society."

To realize the objectives of this strategy, to stimulate the population to *make a fortune* by legal means, at the same time ensure *social justice* among different strata of the population, we should overcome lots of difficulties, and basically complete the cause of national industrialization and modernization by the year 2020.

The transition period of our country coincides with the world entering the 21st century, characterized by the presence of a *knowledge civilization* and an *information society*. The wonderful achievements of the modern scientific and technological revolution are transforming *knowledge, intelligence, and creative mind* into the most decisive factors of development, and *science* into a direct production force. With the modern mass media, this civilization is

exerting its influence on the whole humankind. So, how will the Vietnamese society, Vietnamese people, and Vietnamese women accept and integrate themselves into this civilization so that it can bring about most benefits in the concrete conditions of Vietnam?

Scientists also forecast that the 21st century will be *that of women*. Scientific achievements will help to improve the educational level of women, creating for them many interesting jobs with high productivity in various fields that they had not before, reducing women's hard work in production and household maintenance activities. This will contribute to empowering women, and raising their role and status in society.

This is the dream of the feminine gender, especially working women, and women in developing countries, who still live in poverty.

This dream, not an utopian hypothesis, is based on the wonderful development of science in the world, due to activities of *humans* themselves, with the strength of intelligence and creative mind as the basic motive force for deciding on society's development.

The important question is that Vietnamese women should take positive actions, integrate themselves into the world, boldly stand up and strive to realize their dream. Bringing into play their intelligence and believing in their own abilities, Vietnamese women will strive to become masters of their fate and of society. They will continuously learn to improve their knowledge, to build a comfortable life, a happy family, and make progress worthy of the new generation of women in the 21st century.

Being listed already among the elderly, we wrote this book in 1999, with the hope that in dozens of years, if this subject is discussed again, the situation of Vietnamese society would show profound changes, with outstanding progress in the improvement of women's status.

Surely, many new, different problems will then arise that need to be solved to ensure the harmonious development of both sexes and it will be not necessary to discuss the weak points and losses of women like we do now.

27, July 1999.

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**VIỆC LÀM, ĐỜI SỐNG PHỤ NỮ
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Chịu trách nhiệm xuất bản

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