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TRAN THI VAN ANH
LE NGOC HUNG

Women and **đổi mới** in Vietnam



WOMAN PUBLISHING HOUSE
HANOI

TRAN THI VAN ANH - LE NGOC HUNG

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Second Edition

**WOMAN PUBLISHING HOUSE
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PREFACE

"Long, long ago, women were stronger and more powerful than men..."

Is this a myth or a real tale about the history of humankind? Nobody really knows. The only thing that is concretely known is that women have not been equal to men in most eras. At the end of this century, namely in 1995, representatives of 189 nations in the world gathered together to decide how to fight discrimination against women and increase gender equity.

This book is either a story about the past or a story of the changes that are happening in the world today. This book is about women and Doi Moi (renovation) in Vietnam.

By touching on the various issues of Vietnamese women today and including latest data and information of socio-economic development, this second edition of book will be of interest to many readers. As in the first edition, the book is structured in a unique way to help the reader not only to have access to information, but, if they want, to understand more about the problems of Vietnamese women and the overall reforms which are the concerns of Vietnamese and international readers.

Part I is made up of three chapters that provide a series of basic concepts and definitions of the study of women and issues of women's studies, gender and development, and research methodology in this field. With this conceptual framework in place, readers will be able to easily understand the trends and changes in the socio-economic and cultural lives of women and their families as described in Part II of the book.

Using a variety of data and the results of several recent studies, the four chapters in Part II paint a detailed portrait of how the position and role of women is changing in response to recent socio-economic reforms in Vietnam.

The two chapters in Part III are devoted to developing the scientific foundations for improving social policies towards women so that they match the level of economic renovation in the country.

The authors would like to express their thanks to the leaders and colleagues who provided helpful comments and insights on the first edition book.

We wish to thank the Embassy of Canada and Canadian International Development Agency for their generous support and timely assistance that enabled us to publish the book.

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Our special thanks are expressed to our spouses, friends and family for their great support that enabled us to finish the book.

Dr. Tran Thi Van Anh

Dr. Le Ngoc Hung

PART I

WOMEN'S STUDIES, GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT

CHAPTER 1

ISSUES IN WOMEN'S STUDIES, GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT

1. Women's Studies and the Science of Women

It is important to realize that in other countries, even in those considered the cradle of women's studies, studying Vietnamese women is still not very common. However, in Vietnam, the science of women as a subject of study has been gaining the attention and concern of many people and the concept of the science of women is becoming increasingly familiar.

The situation of women's studies in Vietnam is not similar to history of feminism in the United States. In the United States, although national independence was declared in 1776, it was not until 1920 that women were allowed to vote. Women's studies only gathered momentum in the States in the late 1960s, becoming one of the great achievements of feminism. Fifteen years later, women's

studies had become a well-known subject of teaching and research, attracting 2225 experts engaged in 4490 training courses on women's studies at 995 universities and research institutions (Tamar Berkowitz, 1974).

By 1989, American research and study institutes had developed more than 800 training programs, of which more than 50 are master's programs and 20 are Ph.D. programs in women's studies. Nowadays, these numbers are probably much larger. Nevertheless, it is still difficult to find the definition of the science of woman among the disciplines taught in American universities.

The idea of women's studies was institutionalized in Vietnam with the creation of the Center for Women's Studies under the State Commission of Social Sciences and Humanities in 1987. The aim of the center was to form a link between women's movements both inside and outside of Vietnam. Fifteen years after the center was established, several universities in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) are engaged in the scientific study of women and this subject has become a discipline resembling other sciences such as sociology, philosophy, math, etc. The science of women has been taught in the Department of Sociology and Psychology at Hanoi National University for two years now, and two courses are offered every year attracting 200 students. Since its formation in 1992, the faculty of the science of women at the Semi-Public Open University of HCMC has absorbed 100 students every year.

What are the differences and similarities between women's studies and the science of women? Answering this question will make it clear why women's studies in Vietnam are understood as the science of women.

The Science of Women

If you ask any undergraduate or social sciences expert "what is the science of women?" you may receive an answer such as: "the science of women is the study of women" This definition is quite short and easy to understand. That is why the science of women is becoming increasingly popular at universities. More importantly, perhaps, is that this definition confirms the belief that women's studies or the science of women has legitimacy just like any other discipline, study, or subject.

In fact, the important point is not the terminology, but the understanding that women's studies are not only the study of the fate and status of women in society, but the study of women from the point of view of women and in the interest of women.

In the recent past, people studied about women but used the same criteria that they used to study men. Men created all theories, natural and social sciences, societies and histories of humankind, so no one bothered to pay attention to or distinguish women from men. This ambiguity led to the creation of a damaging stereotype what "woman" is. Social sciences and humanities have long studied social, economic, political, cultural issues of women life. However, these sciences look at women's issues from men's point of view. Few scientists paid attention on whom – man or woman develop these or other theories, concepts from which angle of view. Like the History of human world, the History of Sciences is the Story written by men about men's activities but not women's efforts and contributions. A neutral point of view in sciences means both objectively "blind" gender views. An ivory tower of sciences created by men has been built mainly out of the study of men and men's ideas and points of view. Such an angle, quite obviously, cannot be entirely relevant to women.

Long-established sciences, such as philosophy and young ones such as economics, sociology and information sciences have been providing men with knowledge to adjust and orient their behavior. However, as the knowledge, observation and interpretation of these sciences mainly reflect the practices and point of view of men, such sciences are not much help to women. It would be very dull if there were only males or neutral-sexed creatures in the palace of the sciences. Therefore, studying women from the female point of view and placing women in the center of the disciplines will not only enrich human knowledge but also facilitate social change.

Thus, women's studies has a double function; on the one hand, it provides new knowledge, and on the other hand it corrects men's misunderstandings about women. Women's studies can then, step by step, become a special area of scientific research that will require scientists to revise their theories, methodologies and basic orientations.

We can cite an example from demography to prove this point. Most people agree that demography is the practice of studying the growth rate and structure of a population by concentrating on measuring variables such as birth, death, migration, etc. To do this properly, demography must also understand the characteristics and behavior of women as they undertake different activities, such as working and giving birth. However, demography for the most part is still, in fact, a single-feature theory; even today, males are often presented before females in demographic tables and figures.

Thus, what demography tells us about women is still very limited. For example, if we look at articles published in demography journals in the United States since 1964, all we would know of women is that they give birth to children, raise them and appear to nurture them with very little assistance from men. Only recently has

the concept of the social status of women begun to appear in these journals. Obviously, in order to interpret and anticipate changes in the structure of a population, demography must be more concerned with studying the behavior of women.

On the other hand, women's studies as a new research area are still facing challenges in identifying the object of study, methodology and specifics of its own. At present, studies of women are using the concepts, methods and results of other sciences to solve women's problems. However, the inter- and multi-sectoral characteristics of an analysis of women's problems represent the most unique aspects and strengths of women's studies. The first study of women in Vietnam, *Vietnamese Women across Different Eras* written by Le Thi Nham Tuyet in 1973, is a good example (Le Thi Nham Tuyet, 1973). An interesting and unique point of this study is how methods, concepts, historical data, ethnology and literature are combined to paint a portrait of changes in the fate of Vietnamese women in the history.

In the long run, however, women's studies, as an independent study, need to be specialized. That is, it needs to build its own set of theories as a basis for the study of women. Perhaps, then, it is still too early to talk about a science specializing in women, or to give a strict definition of women's studies and the science of women.

However, it is not wrong or contradictory to teach the "science of women" at universities or to actively study women in the hope that it will become a real science -- the interdisciplinary science of women. In this view, the concept of the science of women and women's studies used in this book are interchangeable, except in some specific cases.

2. Several Basic Concepts in the Science of Women

The most profound and important concept to delineate is obviously the question of what is a woman. Can they be understood as half of society, those who, being biological females, are distinguished from the other, male half? This fact is one part of the answer, but women's studies also emphasizes the importance of "gender" as aspect of social identity, which is often confused with the biological term "sex". Thus, to understand what a woman is, scientifically, it is crucial to distinguish between the biology of sex, of females and males, and the concept of the social science of gender, of women and men.

It is also important not to confuse the concept of social class with gender. Different groups or communities of people who follow the same career, such as a military community or a community of vendors, workers, intellectuals or peasants, must be distinguished from those which are organized by social position.

The term "gender" refers to social relations and the correlation between the social positions of women and men in a certain social context, while, on the other hand, "sex" refers to how the bloodline is maintained and is determined by natural factors.

Talking about gender means paying attention to the social factors and conditions, which determine the social position and behavior of women and men in certain situations. Although gender is constrained by social determinants, gender positions, roles and behaviors are not unchangeable, but on the contrary, they are modified in respect to changes in social determinants.

The concept "sex" refers to biological, natural differences between two sexes: male and female. These differences mainly relate to reproduction systems and hormones. In the past, many

people misunderstood the decisive role of men in having sons and blamed women for delivering daughters instead of sons. Some husbands using this excuse married other wives for having sons in order to continue their bloodline. Modern biology and genetics show that genes are major reasons for being male or female. Fetus with genes XY develop into male and fetus with genes XX – female and only men have gene Y. Therefore, men is one who biologically decides a child to be male or female.

The concept "Sex" emphasizes the unchangeable behavior of men and women seeking to fulfill their biological functions, that is, the natural functions determined by genes and unalterable for both women and men. Sex provides the biological precondition that distinguishes men from women, but how does this difference depend on social determinants? The latest evidence of the physical sciences allows us to reject the theory of the natural, absolute advantage of one sex over the other. For example, in the past, men were considered to be better than women at thinking logically. Nowadays, however, in developed countries, men taking care of and raising children are becoming a popular trend and are now seen as beneficial for the comprehensive development of the child's personality.

Being pregnant and delivering a child have been considered a "natural function" of women. However, the science advanced in the late of twentieth century shows that men are able to fulfil this function as women do. A man can be a "mother" by implanting fetus and relevant hormones in his body. Although this is very complicated procedure, it clearly shows that male-female differences are mainly determined by social factors. The biological factors play the roles of "the basis" and antecedence of gender development. Another example is the difference in longevity of men and women. It is widely recognized that women live longer

than men. Some experts argue that women have biological advantages to survive. However, in poor countries such Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, the lifetime of women is shorter than that of men. This means that biological potentials need relevant social conditions to be realized. Women are heavily affected by socio-economic conditions

In short, sex usually refers to the natural, biological distinction between females and males, while gender usually means emphasizing and interpreting social difference, especially the inequality between men and women. Hence, the concept of gender is both related to and distinct from sex.

In terms of usage, by the first half of the twentieth century the concept of gender was well-integrated into women's movements in Western countries. Relying on this concept, feminists began to argue that gender inequality arises from perceptions and social institutions that discriminate against women, and began to show how the naturalization of the distinction between the sexes was being used to support gender inequality in society. Feminists began to believe that a change in perception and views would reduce gender inequality and injustices.

In the science of women, at first gender was used as a strategy to defuse criticisms made by some researchers about methodology in women's studies. Critics argued that if women's studies concentrated only on separate women's issues, without comparing them with men, women's studies could not become a useful or comprehensive discipline. Consequently, using gender as a concept rather than the concept of women came to be considered a solution to this methodological limitation.

Thus, in fact, the study of gender, first of all, can be understood as women's studies that is not separate from but related

to the study of men. Second, the study of gender can be a study of the social relationships between men and women and a study of men and women to benefit both.

In undertaking their research activities, at first women researchers held to the idea of studying women separately. Later, the concept of gender was developed to create a more tenable position from which to examine and solve the problems of women.

Still, the concept of gender tends to focus on and highlight the social position and role of women. It argues that to gain equality between men and women, it is necessary to change the division of labor, which currently over-emphasizes sex differences between men and women. The path of change, according to this way of thinking, is to empower women in all areas related to decision-making, such as information, education, and control over social and natural resources.

As an interdisciplinary, multi-layered field of study, the science of women often refers to other basic research concepts, such as social justice, social equality, skills development, social status, social activism, employment, income, access to education, health, etc.

Unlike the study of gender, the science of women uses these concepts form a theoretical framework that provides the basis for analyzing status and the role of women independently from their relationship with men and society.

What is particularly important is that the science of women employs popular terms and concepts used commonly in other social and human sciences with clear points of view on the subject and objectives of the research. For example, the concepts of "equality" and "social justice" have very broad meanings and are used in many social sciences. The science of women applies these two concepts

mainly to study the social status of women in their social relations with men and society in general.

With this in mind, it can be seen how social justice has a broader meaning than gender equality. For instance, while there may be gender equality in wages according to the principle of "equal pay for equal work," due to differences in skill levels and proficiencies, female workers still have lower average incomes than men do. Thus, there might be gender equality in wages but no equality in the comparative starting point for women and men, i.e. in training, education and skill improvement.

This study also raises the question of the creation of "conscientious equality," that is, giving women the advantage in recruitment, job placement, and training to create social justice. Experiences and lessons drawn from this practice indicate that "favoring" has only a temporary, short-term effectiveness in improving the social position of women. In the long term, is it more important to create strategies that ensure social justice by developing the social, economic and cultural environments and in ways that take into account the already-existing stratification between men and women.

The attempt to solve "women's problems" in both study and practice is shaped by a very basic and important point of view: that to improve the social position of women does not mean reducing or damaging the social position of men. On the contrary, improving the status and living standards of women will not only help improve the quality of men's lives, but will make society in general more civilized, just and progressive. For example, modernizing the tools and means available to women would reduce the burden of housework often relegated to women. Hence, not only women, but also men, would benefit from increased comfort and convenience.

Abandoning an authoritative point of view would not only allow women but also men to be more relaxed and open in their thought and behavior.

The concept of social justice. By definition, social justice is an objective of social policy, a concept based on real conditions and abilities that a society employs to meet the needs of different groups, classes and individuals. Consequently, it is possible to measure social justice by assessing the equity of current social policies toward women and the family. Studies may be done to answer questions such as: in the context of a multi-sector economy operating via market mechanisms, is social equity increasing or decreasing in the state, private, collective and individual sectors, between delta and mountainous areas, and between urban and rural areas? At what rate is it increasing or decreasing, and why?

The basic principle of social justice under the socialist system is "work according to ability, gain according to contribution." How does this principle work in a market economy regulated by the state according to socialist principles, particularly in terms of social policies aimed at women and families?

First of all, while the concept of social justice can be used to identify, assess, explain, and hence, to suggest solutions to social problems, social justice means more than just egalitarianism--understood as the equal division of labor and income--which in fact can impede the development of individuals and their society. "Social justice" requires the ability to address the contradictions between the needs of different classes, groups and individuals and the ability of the society to meet these needs. For example, it may be socially unjust if changes in health care and education result in more rural girls dropping out of school to help their parents with fieldwork to increase the family income. It will not socially justice if the number of ill women increases due to difficulty in accessing

health care services. Therefore, social justice is the creation of the best conditions for different kinds of women, in a particular context, to contribute fully to society, which will create democracy, social progress and equity for the whole society.

In contrast to the "blind gender" equality, there is discrimination toward women, which must be avoided and eliminated. According to CEDAW definition, this sex-based discrimination includes the exclusion, limitation that negatively affect or constrain women to access, use or enjoy their human rights in all spheres of social life. All these and other kinds of sex-based discrimination damaging women's position and roles should be prevented and removed in order to establish social justice and gender equality.

Secondly, closely linked to the concept of "*social justice*" is the concept of social equality between men and women, which is often called the "*Gender equality*". This concept is relevant to the study of women because it is more precise than studying the concept of social justice for women based on issues that only relate to men. For example, economic adjustment policies have been creating a better environment for different groups of individuals to participate in the private economic sector. This raises an issue for study: whether male-female inequality in job opportunities in this new environment is increasing or decreasing.

The answer, which will be presented in the next section, is surprising and engenders further discussion. In short, male-female inequality is not decreasing. In truth, the new market economy has had positive impacts already, but in the short run it has created a number of social problems. For example, an increasing number of women are working hard for low pay in unsecured working conditions. The housework load has not been reduced at the same

time that women now often function as the main breadwinner for the family.

Thus, the study of social justice contains a comparison, either between the status of women within the gender category of woman, or between men and women, while the study of male-female inequality requires the examination of social issues and events in comparison with gender. Following this distinction, male-female equality is also called gender equality or gender justice.

The third important concept that needs to be examined here is the *development of abilities*. Like social justice and male-female equality, the development of men's abilities is often a basic objective of social policy. Moreover, the development of men is often defined as the impetus and condition for social and economic development and is used to measure social progress. "The free and comprehensive development of every individual provides the conditions for the free and comprehensive development of all people" (Marx and Engels, 1848).

Obviously, the concept of developing men's abilities carries a specific historical weight as well. The content of human development and the extent of personal freedom are determined by the degree of social, cultural and economic development attained by a country. Consequently, the concept of developing abilities has been used to consider issues of social policies about women as well as to analyze the qualifications and practical needs of women. For example, the issues around which socio-economic policies should be centered should include the fact that due to low levels of ability and skills, many women are facing difficulties and inequalities in income and employment, in family and society.

In order to comprehensively define the development UNDP uses the GDI (*Gender-related Development Index*). The lower GDI

the higher gender equality. A country has GDI equal 1 meaning that its gender equality is perfect or there is optimal gender relationships. According to UNDP Development Report, Vietnam's GDI was 0.537 and ranked at the 74th among 174 countries in the world in 1995. In 1999, Vietnam's GDI was 0.664 higher than previous years but its rank is lower – 91st among 174 countries (UNDP, 1995, 1999). This implies that the emerging market economy in Vietnam may bring about new issues and problems with gender development to be solved.

The concepts of social justice, gender equality and development of abilities have been used in radical ways to analyze the situation of women in different contexts, along with other important ideas such as the social status and presence of women in management and administration. These concepts enable us to understand *the positions, roles and degree of participation* of women in policy, organization, management, decision-making, and the monitoring and assessment of activities. Social position and activism can be measured by using indicators such as the number of women in management positions from the local up to national level and the number of women working in important areas in the political, social, legal and economic spheres.

The concept “social integration” in general and “gender integration” in particular refer to the creation of favorable policy environments for women with men actively participating in production, distribution and consumption of goods and services (Le Ngoc Hung, 1999).

In the economic sphere, concepts such as *labor, jobs, and income* have significance because they allow us not only to understand the conditions of women's material lives but also to forecast the effects of economic activities on their physical and

spiritual lives. As a result, this can help us to understand how to correlate economic and social policies toward women and their families.

The concepts of *educational attainment, skills, and health*, theoretically, are relevant in assessing the level of development of women's abilities. Practically, what is important is to analyze the linkage between improving women's education, skills and health and issues of women's socio-economic conditions. This linkage confirms once again that developing the abilities of women is not only the objective of social policies but also the impetus, route, means, and conditions for realizing gender equity.

Social justice and gender equality will not be realized only by good intentions, or by lip service. Social justice, which should be the core of social policy and economic development, will be realized only by developing and improving human capabilities, mobilizing talents and nurturing the intelligence and efforts of every member of society regardless of sex or gender. Economic development, in turn, will create conditions for the development of an equal and civilized society. Otherwise, there will only be the sharing of poverty in a backward environment, a situation that is not acceptable nowadays.

3. Women's Studies as a Subject for Teaching

As we have seen already, the Semi-Public Open University of HCM City has already implemented women's studies as one of the specialization of the undergraduate curriculum, and women's studies has also been introduced into the curricula of several other universities for undergraduate students. Women's studies can be developed and taught in different forms and by using different

methods according to students' needs. However, in general, women's studies as a subject for teaching tends to adhere to common objectives such as the following:

- To equip students with knowledge about the position and role of women.
- To encourage women's studies students to add to scientific, historical, and cultural knowledge about women.
- To motivate and educate students to eradicate discriminatory treatment toward women.

The involvement of women in women's studies program will:

- Increase their activism, self-confidence and independence.
- Eliminate their conservatism and sense of inferiority.

Thus, one of the unique features of teaching women's studies is its ability to create positive changes in the ideology, attitude and behavior of students about women. In addition, women can encourage students to discover and share their experiences and knowledge regarding their position in society.

To achieve this objective, women's studies often consist of three components: studying, developing specific methodologies, and identifying new problems. These components adequately cover all the basic issues of women's studies.

As an example of a women's studies curriculum, subjects for master's degree programs in sociology with a women's studies specialization at the Semi-Public Open University in HCMC include three 1.5 hour modules of introduction to women's studies, four modules on the health of mothers and children, 4 modules on

women and employment, 3 modules on the history of the women's movement in Vietnam, 9 modules on women and income generation programs, 4 modules on protecting the human dignity of women, 3 modules on the world history of feminism, 2 modules on policies toward women, 4 modules on the present situation of Vietnamese women, and 5 modules on women and social legitimacy. These make up 41 credits (36.9 percent) of the curriculum in feminist studies, which consists of 111 credits. This is what a student must complete in order to obtain a degree in sociology with a specialization in women's studies.

This makes for a highly specialized level of content in women's studies. What is also noteworthy is that the subjects in the women's studies specialization engage deeply in current issues such as health care, employment, law, history and social policies related to women.

Along with this, classes on the family and economics, among others, also have links with women's issues. The following main premises are often found in women's studies and other disciplines:

The concept of patriarchy

The concept of paternalism is defined as the way our social, economic, political and cultural lives are organized based on sex. Introduction to women's studies and the sociology of women often focuses on this theme. The analysis of this theme aims to clarify the subordination of women and the domination of men in families and society, and to indicate the sources, consequences and changes in these aspects in the history of social development.

Prejudice about the role of gender

Women's studies often explore this topic by introducing and analyzing images of women, for example, in religion, films and advertisements. The main idea here is to help students learn to discover and analyze prejudices stereotypes and attitudes about the role of women or men in order to understand established discriminatory mechanisms and ways to change them.

Distinguishing sex and gender

This topic is often covered in the psychology of women and gender. Women's studies tries to show how social reasons have been used to distinguish between men and women in order to eradicate prejudice and discrimination between men and women.

Sexual life and reproductive health

This topic covers aspects of sexual behavior and lifestyle, including pregnancy and delivery. Protection of mother and child health is one of the main topics in this area.

Marriage and family life

Unlike the Psychology of family, women's studies focuses on examining types of families, revealing their positive and negative effects on women. Women's studies is especially interested in the establishment of equity in family relations and the provision of social conditions necessary to form these types of families. Like family psychology and sociology, women's studies pays close attention to socialization in the family. For example, attention is paid to how children learn to play the role of male or female within the family.

Labor and employment

Women's studies identify the need for re-examining the ways of looking at and solving problems of the labor and employment of women. For example, this topic includes the study of whether it is viable to development recruitment and payment policies preferential to females and how female labor can be defined to include non-paying work, such as housework and raising children.

The gender research topics are much various and widely discussed in training courses of gender. Examining the list of scientific works on women and gender in published in Vietnam during 1993-1999 shows that there were 130 works addressing 10 groups of topics. The most popular topics are women's economic activities, women's poverty, domestic violence against women, women's health and family planning. However, very little research has concentrated on theoretical issues of gender and development.

4. The Theoretical Significance of Women's Studies

Many researchers have argued that because other sciences study both men and women, general laws have been identified that are applicable to all people, regardless of sex. In reality, it has not turned out like this. It turns out that we understand very little about women--the other half of humankind. Women have not been studied much yet; moreover, if they are, they are studied and looked at through men's eyes. Many things about women have been understood only on the surface, and wrongly, not only by ideologues but also by scientists. An example of this is how the ideology of men requires them to treat each other well, and yet discriminate against and neglect the abilities of women. This is the

ideology that is rooted in the minds of many people, families, and social classes.

In fact, several modern educational theories have even been derived from the theory that men are more active and stronger than women, who are seen as passive and weak. A man is often thought to be inclined to develop intellectually while a woman is thought to develop sentimentally. Hence, proponents of this theory have developed different educational methods and programs relevant to either men or women. In fact, such theories have made a serious mistake because men and women are different only in terms of sex, that is, biologically. That is why women must be educated in order to be criticized and educated, mobilized and persuaded in order to eradicate this backward ideology and develop a progressive and positive view of the role of women in every area of social life.

Women's studies have revealed a distinction, for example, between the educational attainment and income levels of men and women. These inequalities are due mainly to social factors such as economic conditions and social opportunities. This means that any type of gender inequality can be eradicated and gender equality can be established if social and economic conditions are the same for both men and women.

The study of women is crucial for revealing incorrect attitudes about women, and women's studies can identify the reasons and effects of such misunderstandings. Women's studies can then contribute to developing correct knowledge about women in particular and society in general.

For example, to correctly access the role of women in the economic transitions taking place in Vietnam today, economists

need to develop new methods of collecting and processing information, because most of women's economic activities have been taking place in the informal sector, which is not fully covered by official statistics. It is also necessary to redefine several concepts that have considered the basis of economics, such as "labor," "employment", and "production." These concepts have mainly been examined in relation to commodities and the market. However, when have all the activities of women, including housework and raising children, been counted by society as "labor"? Perhaps because of this question, the concepts of "family labor" and "house-keeping" as employment have arisen and are now being examined.

Research on women may start with issues of women and initially be oriented only toward women. However, as society is made up of both women and men, so research on women is related to men's issues and society at large. Tools and methods already in use may be employed by women's studies, but at the same time new measures and methods need to be developed. It can be argued that women's studies is important for improving the functioning of research methods in general and, and the same time, enriching the stock of research methodologies in the social sciences.

With this deep, broad and flexible mode of thought in place, women's studies can contribute to forming new bases for the assessment, comparison, and solving of problems not only about women, but also about men and society in general. Thus, women's studies play a vital role in understanding and liberating women and hence, are vital for understanding and liberating men.

Thus, women's studies are necessary to provide better understanding of women life and promote the women's liberation.

This also benefits men and society in the whole. To complete these task women's studies must involve more attention from scientists, professionals and policy makers. In practice, women's studies are taught at University and centers, and taken into consideration by development programmers. This encourages gender experts to further sharpen their research skills and knowledge to meet increasing needs of understanding new problems rising from an emerging market economy in the country.

CHAPTER 2

GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT: METHODOLOGY OF WOMEN'S STUDIES

1. Challenges to Women's Studies as an Area of Research Challenges from subject-matter

As a specialized area of research, women's studies are facing many challenges in this intense development period. It appears that women's studies are facing difficulties in building up and developing a uniform way of looking at or approaching the study of women. A simple reason for this is that women's studies researchers have increasingly been realizing the diversity and richness of their study subjects, women.

There is also the fear that women's studies is being infringed upon and encompassed by other kinds of study, among them gender studies and family studies. So what are the challenges facing women's studies? What strategies has it developed to react to these

challenges? These are urgent questions for those concerned with this type of research.

The fact is that after two decades of strong and confident development, women's studies is steadily moving toward a new stage of development, where women themselves are learning how to do a self-assessment of the real situation of their knowledge and understanding, research theories and methodologies. Thereby it can determine their changing position in relation to other research areas. This is also the stage where women's studies have to answer more complex questions emerging from real life. With these concrete aims, women's studies are proving to be a lively and active arena of research.

The diversity of the study subject represents a large challenge for women's studies. This means that the distinctions and differentiation between women are constantly changing the way we approach women's issues. For example, in researching the role of women as mothers, a researcher must distinguish the significance of this role as determined by different historical and cultural factors. Or, in analyzing the social and economic situation of women, research must pay attention to the polarization of rich and poor as well as indicate differences between groups of women who live in geographically and administratively different areas. In other words, women's studies cannot approach women in general, but only specific groups of women belonging to different classes, ethnicity, ages, economic conditions, and levels of experience.

This, in turn, lays the groundwork for reconsidering general understandings about women. For example, if all families have paternalistic tendencies or all women depend on men or suffer from the effects of paternalism, then what does this mean for specialized

women's studies that takes into account the diversity of its subjects? Women's studies may concentrate on different specialized areas or historical contexts, but these areas should be chosen and used to clarify the situation of women everywhere.

The challenge of gender studies

Since the mid-1980s, gender studies has developed strongly. The term "gender" became common and almost replaced the word "woman" in studies and publications. That is why women's studies have been catching onto the field of gender studies. There is also the feeling that women's studies and gender studies duplicate each other.

In practice, whenever we talk about gender studies the most obvious topics are women's issues. This makes trainees confused of these two studies. How are differences between women's studies and gender studies? Why talking about women's studies focuses on gender issues and vice versa: gender studies need to address women's problems?

What are women's studies, in fact? Women's studies uses women as its object and studies women based on the point of view of women and for women, while gender studies targets the social relationship between men and women. This relationship may be economical, familial, or societal, as well as the relations of the two sexes in seizing opportunities, taking advantage of resources and gains sharing.

What issues derived from gender studies should be attended to? First, gender studies also touches on issues of women; hence the idea of focusing only on women is sometimes criticized. The question is even raised of whether it is viable to study women at all, instead of the relations between men and women.

Second, gender study centers on the relations between women and men, that is, the social behavior of both are seen as the object of the basic study. However, the political, social, cultural and economic distinctions made between women and men are not always examined in the sense of unequal relations. So, is this contradictory to the aims of women's studies, which is focused on liberating women from gender inequality?

In other words, if the term "gender" is used instead of "woman", "gender studies" instead of "women's studies," how will women's issues be examined and addressed? Are topics such as women's power and liberation current issues? Must all research about women be concerned with what male society requires of them and how society has shaped them?

Gender studies seems to have more advantages in answering the first question. The reality is that women's issues will be more effectively addressed if they are put together with gender issues. For instance, take the issue of improving the health of women by decreasing their fertility rate. Family planning efforts, which center only on women, are not successful. Now, policy makers and population experts know that is necessary to have not only women but also men involved in family planning.

However, women's studies have more advantages in answering the second question. Researchers have realized that power; equality and liberation are questions not only for women but also for men.

Besides challenges relating to the subject, there are also challenges to theories and methodologies. Some researchers have recently decried the so-called "holes" in women's studies. They argue that there is no basic discipline or overarching theory that forms the foundation of women's studies, and that women's studies

relies only on descriptive methods and qualitative measurements. That is, they argue that women's studies are more a movement than a discipline. These arguments force us to examine more closely the question of whether women's studies are an independent scientific discipline.

2. Women's Studies: Questions of Independence and Activism

Women's studies researchers are familiar with the above questions and analytical comments and consider them challenges that must be overcome on the path to developing women's studies as an independent science. In fact, as we have defined it, women's studies is the study of the features, specifics, characteristics, laws and rule that are expanding or emerging and that are changing the status and position of women in society.

Compared to sociology, defined as the science of relations between people and society, the subject of women's studies is much more concrete and clear, in that it focuses specifically on the relation between women and society and men. This definition demonstrates the relatively independent position of women's studies in the system of social and human sciences.

It may be too early to say that feminist study does not have great theories or basic studies as its foundation. It is, however, never too late to realize that all grand social and sociological theories, such as those developed by Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, can also be used to talk about issues of women (Le Ngoc Hung, 1996).

It is obvious that women's studies rely not only on the great social theories developed by Karl Marx and those who shared his

ambitions but also apply the concepts and methodologies of Emile Durkheim and Max Weber. Theories about social structures, systems, networks, social interactions, social actions, social roles, etc. are not unfamiliar to women's studies, which has used them to develop basic positions and methodologies and initiate important projects. For example, women's studies takes into account Dorothy Smith's theories about how to transform women's experiences into a subject of scientific research and study, and Esther Boserup's theories about how to understand the role of women in economic development in developing countries (Smith, 1987).

It is impossible not to realize that the findings coming out of women's studies have been bringing out large theoretical issues that are shaking the foundations of ideas and theories in other sciences. Sociologists, for example, have not only applied concepts of gender and women in empirical research to address concrete studies of the family and social groupings and structures, but have also tried to build up specialized disciplines such as the sociology of women and the sociology of gender. Before, economics was focused on issues such as production, labor, capital, technology, markets, etc. Recently, it started to talk about gender equity in terms of labor and income. In particular, socio-economic disciplines with women's economic activities as an important component are growing rapidly.

The theoretical and methodological influence of women's studies in the sciences is so large that people have started to talk about a "revolution" in the social and human sciences. Truly, the problem of sciences is not only that they have been "gender blind" and not focused on women in the past, but that they now have to add the "female" side to their research to fill in the gap. The problem is in the accuracy of the positions, methodologies and findings of these sciences. As we already noted the sciences of men,

about men and created by men, hardly reflect the importance of gender in the social world.

The nature of gender is clearly revealed, for instance, in "female" and "male" language, in "feminine" and "masculine" behavior and in "woman's role" and "men's roles," in a society where there is "woman's work" and "men's work." To understand the nature of gender in studying any subject, it is necessary to make changes in the theories and methodologies accordingly. Thus, it is clear that women's studies must have very accurate theories and evidence so that it can wake up the other social and human sciences and help them incorporate new issues of women and gender.

Activism

Unlike other sciences, which have tried to develop activist practices out of theory, women's studies emerged first as a movement and then began to develop into a science. Hence, it is full of the potential to breathe new life into research, theory, and methodology. In this way, women's studies can be seen first as a "movement" that can bring to light and address women's issues in modern social life.

In terms of theory and perception, women's studies are based on the following methodological positions. First, it argues that women are dependent and subordinate in society and that there is inequality, social injustice and discrimination between women and men. For example, it is undeniable that women's wages are lower than men's in many countries around the world that women spend more time and energy for housework than men do. But it is true that the degree of women's participation in the management of social and economic activities is lower than that of men.

Second, women's studies asserts that the subordinate position of women in society is not just "the way things are", but something that is unjust and debilitating. Let's take an example from applied psychology. A group of people was invited to observe and comment on the behavior of a group of 3 year-old boys and girls, and then forecast their futures. The result was that girls were labeled with "feminine" terms such as "*obedient*," "*likable*," "*lovely*," "*will be a teacher in the future*" etc. Boys were labeled with "*masculine*" terms such as "*brave*," "*active*," "*strong*" and "*will be a pilot in the future*".

In fact, in this study girls wore boys' clothes and boys wore girls', so the adults who participated in this test as commentators actually based their reactions on the way the children were dressed. The results indicate that male roles and female roles are perceived as something like clothing, even before the child has a chance to form his or her own desires and wishes. The subordinate position of women follows the same logic: it is created, not natural, as many people believe.

Therefore, the third precept is that it is entirely possible to improve the social position of women by eradicating beliefs that relegate them to a subordinate position. Women's studies researches, interprets, forecasts and monitors social phenomena to improve the social status of women and hence, make their contribution to society more equal to that of men.

In terms of research methodologies, women's studies applies three basic precepts as follows:

First, women's studies does not apply only scientific methods, such as observation, measurements, interviews, empirical methods, etc. It also uses other common statistical methods in processing information, but attempts to overcome the shortcomings and

drawbacks of these methods by trying to combine and develop other research methods as well. Because empirical methods based on formal, rational and objective perceptions neglect the fluidity and subjective quality of feelings; the object of women's studies is to capture the complicated, lively, and diverse experiences that fill the lives of women. Therefore, the rigid methodologies found in the empirical sciences, which western scientists prefer to use in their analyzes, are not completely relevant to women's studies, which instead focuses on the complexity and individuality of the research object. As we have already noted, analytical methods that delve into specific contexts, cases, environments and personal details of individuals and groups of women are seen as more relevant. In particular, combining different sources of information on different aspects of the lives of women allows us to discover unique aspects, features and changes in the position of women. For example, to analyze the labor and employment of Vietnamese women in this era of economic renovation, government regulations, policies on economic development, population statistics, and data about culture and ways of life can all be used.

Second, women's studies do not limit itself to describing, analyzing and forecasting from an outsider's point of view. It tries to address issues of women first of all as insiders. This is partly because women's studies was grown out of and was nursed by the endless inspirations and deep sympathy that the researchers have with the disadvantageous and difficult lives of women in society. Moreover, women's studies criticizes unreasonable and unjust things and shows respect to beauty and the small sparkles of brilliance in the difficult lives of many women. Hence, it can be said that women's studies goes far beyond other sciences in terms of

its ability to capture feelings and common experiences, because it is so embedded in the poetry and struggles of women's everyday lives.

Finally, there is the precept that women's studies must "*change the world*." Unlike many other sciences which have emerged from the palace of men's sciences, women's studies is rooted to a social movement, feminism, which aims to improve the social position of women in concrete ways. Women's studies have been sensitive not only to issues emerging from this relationship but to discovering conflicts and proposing practical solutions.

That is why considering women's studies a "*movement*" does not mean overlooking it or reducing its scientific and methodological significance, but means instead focusing on its success at creatively introducing subjective experience into the realm of the falsely objective. In this respect, women's studies is moving from interpreting the world to transforming it, a call to action that Karl Marx voiced long ago.

In short, women's studies stem from real life and serve it. Thus, the best strategy for attacking the above-mentioned challenges is for it to continue on the path it is already on, keeping track of the practical branch of feminism and identifying feminist activists' new and changing concerns. Only this strategy can protect the dialectical relationship between theory and practice that is the crux of women's studies.

3. Research Methods

As a new research area, women's studies have been quick in dealing with radical changes in research methods in the social sciences, especially sociology. Since the late 1980s, sociological

studies have been applying modern research methods to collect and process data. Along with others methods, these practices make up the so-called sociological methods. Up to now, about 80% of sociological studies have applied sociological methods (Pham Dinh Huynh and Pham Chien Khu, 1995).

It is therefore not strange that women's studies researchers have been actively employing sociological methods to study women and gender. What is noteworthy is that women's studies have selectively and analytically applied these methods. The limitations of traditional research methods for women's studies have been clearly defined and, at the same time, new and significantly effective ones have been developed, criticized and accepted in order to further improve them.

Application of Sociological Research Methods

A sociological (research) method means any research method professional sociologists use to address their research topics. It may be a method of conducting observation, surveys or interviews or using case studies or tests. It may also include sampling, quantifying, qualifying or processing data. Sociological methods are distinguished from other methodologies by how the measurement of the scientific content and accuracy of statements and results are judged. In fact, sociological methods are quite distinguishable from those used in other sciences, which include physical methodologies, mathematical methods and philosophical inquiry.

Several points here deserve closer attention. First, other sciences have been using these methods as well, such as natural sciences. Social sciences such as psychology are also familiar with the interview method. Thus, we can say that research methods themselves are not the only features that define sociology.

In other words, mainly goals and subjects, ideas and issues, theories and concepts determine the sociological nature of certain research methods. For example, interviewing--seen by some people as the prime research method in sociology--can also be used extensively in psychology if psychologists wish to conduct an interview to make an assessment of a subject's capacity for memory or thinking. Or, the method of association and the method of "looking into the soul", which are considered psychological methods, can also be entirely sociological methods. This is because sociologists can employ these methods to understand the cause-and-effect relationship between socio-economic events and changes taking place in the process of personality development in a generation.

Second, although sociological methods have become increasingly common, a common name or classification for them has not yet been defined. For example, some people may call the same method an interview or a survey (Pham Dinh Huynh and Pham Chien Khu, 1995; Pham Tat Dong et. al., 1995).

There are a few ways of classifying research methods. For convenience, existing methods may be classified into two main groups: (1) collecting and (2) processing data. This way of classifying emphasizes the decisive importance of clearly defining the theoretical issues and operational principles of the research. To explain this, we can imagine that women's studies, as sociological research, is a large iceberg. A small part of the iceberg, which is above water, consists of data collection, while the other two thirds of the iceberg are underwater and make up data processing. This large chunk also includes conceptual sociological thinking. We might also say that sociological thinking looks like a red thread going through the weave of a study, from the project design through

collecting and processing data and analyzing and presenting the results.

Third, most sociological researchers mainly use the method of collecting as much data as possible. This means that researchers are concerned with increasing the size of the sample labeled N (capital N). (For example, the number of persons, households or enterprises.) Using interviews, questionnaires and direct questioning usually increases the sample, which are considered basic sociological methods and are widely used.

Although this method has a number of positive features, women's studies cannot neglect other important methods. Among these are the case study and the in-depth interview. If we call the method described above an N-method (the size of the sample may reach into the thousands), this other group of methods can be called the n-method, which may consist of a very small sample (Ragin, 1989).

Some people classify these methods into quantitative and qualitative methods. However, this classification is not adequate because it represents only two sides of sociological research. In truth, every researcher wishes to discover both "numbers that can talk," i.e. quantitative findings and laws, features and other qualitative data, which can be tested and proved in reality. However, in addition to understanding the difference in numbers (N-big and n-small), a researcher needs to pay attention to other basic differences to select and combine these methods effectively.

Regarding goals, N-method is mainly aimed at collecting data as variables, measuring changes in global and particular aspects of social phenomena in order to interpret these observed variables and changes and to test (prove, accept or reject) a theoretical statement. On the other hand, n-method is aimed at understanding social

phenomena by carefully examining the subject as a whole in order to discover and interpret common and stable variables and develop and apply theories.

Regarding approach, N-method centers on analyzing and inferring a simple cause-effect relation (like A-low level of education is the reason for B-low income) and probability (e.g. X has a high education and is likely to have more possibilities for making a higher income than Y, who has a low education). At the same time, n-method focuses on interpreting generally and historically a complicated cause-effect relation. For example, under various conditions, such as C-northern rural Vietnam, D-poor state of health, E-high fertility rate and F-insufficient credit, A-low education may be the reason for B-low income.

In addition to this, a basic distinction between these two methods is that N-method uses quantified figures analyzed in the form of numbers, while n-method uses qualified figures analyzed in verbal form as extracted from the research subjects. Thus, qualified figures reflect more deeply the feelings and attitudes of the people studied. For example, a detailed description of the daily life of a few single mothers can have more impact than a report with figures on the incomes and living standards of a thousand such women.

It is clear, then, that the careful consideration, comparison and combination of the two methods described can be more effective than relying on one and neglecting the other.

Finally, another point worth noting relates to methods of processing data. One of the reasons why N-method is preferred is because the data can be processed on a computer, which is why statistics programs such as SYSTAT, SPSS, SAS and STAT have become very popular. With SPSS, for example, a popular processing program in Vietnam, a user can pull out any number or

percentage very quickly. As a result, a very detailed, careful and time-consuming job that was done manually before can now be processed as easily as playing a game on the computer.

However, data processing by computer does not necessarily mean findings and figures will be precise, because the outcome of this process will only be reliable if the input is clean and accurate. This confirms again the significance and consistency of sociological studies composed of thought methods, data collecting, and data processing.

Critics and development of methodology

In accepting sociological methods, women's studies researchers quickly recognize the limitations of such methods in describing and analyzing women, a diverse and multi-faceted research subject.

These limitations can arise in different forms, not only at a particular stage of the research process but at any stage. To understand these particular limitations, it is sometimes necessary to go beyond the scope of research methods. Depending on the nature of the complication, sometimes researchers must tackle the problem from the standpoint of philosophy or research ethics. Below are several examples that are commonly cited among the many that are faced.

Relations between researcher and researched

In the social sciences, it is now understood that doing research is usually marked by the existence of an exploitative relationship between the researcher and the human subject. Researchers may say they want to explore an area extensively, but then only collect a minimal amount of data on which to base their theories. Research like this often has no benefit and wastes time by

asking irrelevant questions, and respondents sometimes emerge from meetings with these kinds of researchers with the strong feeling that nobody is really interested in them and their problems. What researchers may seem to want is some information and nothing more. For example, in one case several rural Vietnamese women said they could not understand why researchers were not satisfied with them, whether it was because they could not remember something or because they could not precisely express what they wanted because of interruption by children, etc.

In addition, researchers often do not keep their promise to inform the subjects about the results of the study. This is a widespread problem and may cause problems for future research. Given this, it is not surprising when researchers do not gain the continued support and collaboration of their subjects.

The source of such problems is sometimes in the research work and methodologies themselves. That is, sometimes the outcome, such as publications, working papers, essays, etc., must be produced on time in accordance with the regulations set forth by a scientific community, regardless of the ultimate direct or indirect effect of the outcome of research on the subject. In addition, due to the widespread problem of underestimating women, research methods in themselves may be male-biased.

Women's studies argues that to bring about positive social changes, a researcher should not only be satisfied with making a timely report in accordance with requirements, but should also be concerned with how to use the research to create a positive two-way link between the researcher and the subject. The subject, in this case, is then not treated as a passive individual but can become an active, reliable and mutually respected actor in the research process. By keeping this in mind, the flexibility and diversity of women's

understanding, knowledge, experiences and feelings can be revealed and exchanged, enriching the intelligence and life experience of the people involved in the research. Only through this method can research go beyond the usual limitations of a dry and prejudiced research project, instead becoming a vital and creative product of two different types of actors.

Women's studies "through men's eyes"

This phrase describes the problem of looking at and perceiving issues through a man's partial vision. Under the male gaze, women's lives, activities and the ways they think and feel are often seen as unimportant and not deserving of attention.

In research "through men's eyes," which focuses only on men to produce knowledge that is supposed to represent both genders, such as in studies on rural poverty, there has been an absence of thought, language and research tools that fully address women's issues. Similarly, there are many studies on social justice that cover the various faces of social inequality, such as income, status, educational degree, etc., but do not cover gender inequality. Obviously, researchers have not seen gender inequality as capable of contributing scientific content to the study. In these cases, researchers may accurately use sociological methods to collect information but the information they obtain can tell them only partly what they need to know about life.

Another aspect of the partial vision of men is revealed in studies that use male criteria to judge women. From this point of view, what is seen to be the "essence" of men is emphasized in data collection and analysis. For example, the number of studies on women's health is much smaller than the number of studies on mother's health. Apparently, women's health only becomes important for researchers when they become mothers.

Another example can be found in the use of a double standard. This is the measurement or assessment of a behavior or event by using different norms or yardsticks for men and women. In studies of the family, for example, the role of the wife is usually thought to consist of fulfilling certain duties and obligations, while the role of the husband is usually examined in terms of their contribution to the family budget. These studies often come with instructions to soften the burden of housework on women by increasing family services and equipment, but usually do not suggest sharing the burden with the husbands.

The objectivity of studies

As we mentioned earlier, researchers tend to use the N-method to collect data and apply statistical means to process the data. These methods, which come in many forms, seem to be more objective than the n-method, which usually presents data in the form of stories. Mathematical tests and numbers are often thought to be difficult for readers to understand, which results in the impression that they are more scientific or objective.

As we already know, N-methods or quantitative surveys are often based on certain theoretical grounds. Theories, as used in the social sciences, are understood as explanations of some phenomena and relations between related components. The objective of the research is to gather and examine evidence to check the adequacy of the explanation. The argument here is that the presentation of a theory should include more data than other stages of the study (Jayaratne, 1980). Especially if these theories have been drawn from the experiences of men, however, a study that appears to be objective may actually not be as objective as it seems. That is why women's studies researchers are careful about using N-methodology, because the arguments that have been used to exclude n-methodologies have not always proved correct. Similarly, n-

methodologies, although considered more subjective, may actually produce correct and objective information. Research outcomes are often misunderstood due to the objective sense created by the use of figures and numbers, so women's studies researchers should be attuned to the advantages as well as the disadvantages of every research methodology in order to better combine them to apply them to women's issues.

To avoid the repetition of shortcomings in using particular research methods, women's studies researchers have worked out several guiding rules for research. These principles are based on the argument that women's studies research is a process of building knowledge to solve practical problems for the benefit of women. These principles include:

- Women build knowledge together, not individually as the object of research or as the one who collects the information.
- A researcher has a dual role as trainer and trainee.
- Women's studies research is oriented toward increasing social justice and gender equality.
- Women's studies research aims to create progress for women, but not through women alone. Men can and should also study women.
- Women form a diversified group, hence women's studies needs to cover all ethnic, cultural, class and age groupings.

Methods of information collection that women's studies has been using are often a combination of the following methods:

- Observation
- Personal meetings and direct, formal speaking
- In-depth interviews for specific cases
- Group discussions

- Survey by questionnaires
- Participatory approach¹
- Stories of women's lives
- Analysis of papers and reports²

Gender experts develop several tools of analysis basing on above principles and methods. These tools can be used for various research topics related to gender division of labor and policy analysis from women's studies point of view. They are:

- Analyze the gender division of domestic labor to answer question: who does what?
- Analyze position and roles of women in society to understand gender relationships
- Analyze the extend to which women participate in decision-making process and management.
- Analyze the women's ability to access and control resources
- Analyze practical and strategic needs of women and men in society.

In fact, methods and tools must be chosen to fit the research objectives and topics. It is very important to pay much attention on theoretical and conceptual issues in doing research of women's issues. Gender experts can be sure of their work keeping in mind a great thinker's saying: the most practical research is well-based theoretical one.

¹ Le Ngoc Hung. *Sociology of Economy*. Hanoi National University Press. Hanoi. 2000.

² See *Proceedings of a periodical meeting of the Feminist Research Organization for Action (FRAPNET)*, Bangkok, 1 May, 1996.

CHAPTER 3

GENDER, THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

1. Gender Issues and the Women's Movement

Worldwide, the Women's or Feminist movement can be generally defined as the organized activities undertaken by women in the interest of helping women to achieve equality. The Women's Movement may be active in one or several spheres of social activity at the same time, but usually focuses on the hot and urgent issues of women's lives. The Movement searches for practical solutions to the most specific and pressing problems of the majority of women in a given period of time in concrete social, cultural and economic contexts.

Beginning in the 1930s, under the leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) the Women's Movement in Vietnam became closely linked to the country's national liberation movement. The ultimate objective of the Women's Movement at

that time, as well as now, was to achieve national independence and the unification of the country to create peace, prosperity and happiness for all people, including women.

The necessity of liberating women was recognized by the CPV right at the very beginning and was a major concern during the entire revolutionary period. The ideology of Ho Chi Minh and the policy of the Party outlined how the process of national liberation and socialist revolution was dependent on the liberation of women and also closely linked to class liberation. In truth, without national freedom and independence, women also cannot be free and independent, hence a society that does away with aggression and class exploitation also frees women from aggression and exploitation. Thus, women's liberation, in the end, creates conditions for developing women's abilities and is also closely related to men's and overall social liberty.

Women's liberation has been viewed by the CPV as one of prime objectives of the Vietnamese revolution, and women were long considered the basic force of the revolution. This point of view, first of all, stems from the deep sympathy felt by the nation about the fate of Vietnamese women under the feudal and imperialist regimes. Understanding the ties between the deep pain of women and the pain of loosing the country, Ho Chi Minh sharply criticized colonialism for creating "...No place where women could avoid the rude actions of invaders... They say 'the colonial regime is a thieving regime' We would like to add that it is a regime that rapes and violates women and kills men." (Ho Chi Minh, 1969).

More important and influential than sympathy, however, has been the perception of the Party of the role and position of women in revolutionary battles. "The revolutionary force created by women is very critical. If the majority of women do not participate in it, the

revolution cannot succeed." (Party conference document, 1970). Later, the Party emphasised that, in constructing socialism, "... If woman are not freed, the construction of socialism will only be halfway done" (President Ho and the issue of liberating women, 1970).

According to Lenin, the oppression of women was rooted in colonial and capitalist exploitation, feudal relations and women's "slave position in the family." (Lenin and the issue of liberating women, 1970). Based on this perception, the Party developed numerous slogans strongly agitating for woman's interests, and, after achieving independence, developed policies to involve women in social activities and create conditions for them to use their competence in the construction of socialism and defence of the country. Responding to the encouragement of the Party, generations of Vietnamese women have maintained the active roles in the nation's history, working shoulder to shoulder with men in every field and making extremely significant contributions to the achievement of national independence and the construction of a new society.

Looking back at the position and policies of the Party and the history of the women's mobilization movement in Vietnam, some conclusions can be drawn:

- Stemming from the objective demand for human resources, first of all, the Party has always seen women as an important engine of social and economic development. This point is clearly reflected in the words of Ho Chi Minh: "What needs to be done to build socialism? Definitely it means significantly increasing production. To produce more, a larger labor force is required. To do this, the female labor force must be

liberated." (President Ho and the issue of liberating women, 1970).

- By encouraging women to participate in social activities, policy-makers, through the different policies that they made, developed a relatively comprehensive set of views on the different roles and duties a woman needs to fulfil in the family and in society. This view was well understood at the time when all Vietnamese people had to devote all of their resources to the country during the revolutionary battles. Competitions such as the "Two good points" and "Three well-done jobs" programs motivated women to excel at the duties and jobs assigned to them by the country and to actively involve themselves in the production and business spheres. The wide network of existing kindergartens and preschools in both urban and rural areas not only freed up mothers for other kinds of labour but also emphasized the society's concern for sharing work that had previously only been considered the province of women.

- Based on its clear understanding of the position of women and its dedication to liberating them, the Party initiated a nation-wide movement to encourage women to participate in the country's defence and construction activities. As a result, many cadres and party members changed their tendency to overlook the contributions of women, and this helped build a new set of values and norms regarding women in society. The Women's Movement in Vietnam, therefore, has always enjoyed the support of the progressive elements of society.

- The Women's Movement in Vietnam has also attracted the support, agreement and concrete contributions of men. Through their revised views and actions, men have been

contributing substantially to the cause of women's liberation. Many men in a range of positions have been making solid contributions to the creation of gender equality in the country.

The social role and status of Vietnamese women have been improved dramatically throughout the country's development process. This confirms that a new and higher level of social progress, reflected in gender equality, can be established even in the context of an underdeveloped economy. This progress is a direct result of enhanced perceptions of the role, position and significance of the work that women have been doing for the society and family, as well as due to women's increasing awareness of their own competence and abilities.

For more than a half of this century, the Vietnam Women's Union has struggled to consolidate the power of women as they worked together to liberate the nation and themselves. One significant outcome of the struggle has been the development of a strong tradition of Vietnamese women joining in the country's defence and construction. For example, at the beginning of this century, many women joined the "Can Vuong Movement" and the "Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc", in order to criticise and fight against the French colonial regime.

The first Women's organisation in Vietnam was formed on the 20th of October in 1930 to gather women together under the flag of national liberation. This union had different names at different periods, such as the Association to Liberate Women, the Association of Democratic Women, the Association of Anti-imperialist Women, the National Group for Rescuing Women and, currently, the Vietnam Women's Union. The Union has motivated and mobilised the female masses to join in the work of the nation to achieve the common goals of the Vietnamese revolution. Having

long been oppressed, exploited and relegated to a subordinate position under the feudal and imperialist regimes, women understood well that they would be liberated along with the liberation of the entire nation. During the long struggle to reclaim the country, Vietnamese women neither stood apart from the national effort nor took passive roles. They have been and always will be in pioneering roles, achieving difficult goals throughout the nation's long history. By participating in national liberation efforts and the construction of the country, Vietnamese women have step-by-step freed themselves and achieved well-deserved positions and voices in society.

The Women's Movement in Vietnam has gone through a number of stages in its development. One of major turning points of the movement took place in the 1980s. In the past, the focus of the Women's Movement was the mobilisation of women in war efforts, labour and production activities to meet common revolutionary goals, but now their focus has shifted somewhat. These days, women are becoming more and more attuned to their personal interests and aware of their rights. To make the use of their capabilities in today's rapidly changing environment, the Women's Movement has to face new challenges and protect their basic interests, including the provision of jobs, increasing incomes and improving health care. The Vietnam Women's Union has expanded its activities into new areas, such as providing mutual support in doing business and enhancing training and improving knowledge, skills and health care.

Five large-scale programs developed by the VWU in 1990s now involve millions of women. They are:

- (1) Training and retraining to improving knowledge and skills for women;
- (2) Providing credit support and creating job opportunities and to increase women's incomes;
- (3) Improving health care for children and women and access to family planning;
- (4) Renovating the organisation of the cadres and Party apparatus, including mobilizing and organising the Union's funds; and
- (5) Studying, controlling and monitoring issues related to women and children as well as strengthening female participation in State management work.

The perception of gender is also becoming more and more significant for the Women's Movement in the process of renovating the Union's activities.

Efforts to attract men's participation have been implemented in many areas. For example, the VWU is the leading agency for getting men involved in the implementation of family planning. Contests organized by the Ho Chi Minh City Women's Union on strengthening the husband and father's role in the family have enjoyed the wide support and extensive participation of men. There have also been an increasing number of study projects involving men, and several cases in which men have applied for membership in the Women's Union to gain access to loans and technical training courses.

The network of VWU offices has also introduced new knowledge and conceptions about gender to central and local managerial and planning officials. About 30% of participants in

training activities on gender undertaken in 1992-1995 were men, including central and local Government officials. The activities of the VWU have been increasingly focused on implementing the important social and economic goals of the country. Thus, issues relating to meeting the needs and desires of women must be the concerns not only of women but men in different agencies and at different levels of society.

2. The Women's Movement and Research

Some people argue that women's studies research is actually just a movement; they argue that it contains little scientific content because it pursues and serves the goal of women's liberation. These people, however may not realize that the more that research is linked to reality, the more profound its scientific and theoretical bases are bound to become.

The Women's Movement has close relations and interactions with many facets of women's studies research. First of all, the Movement provides an endless source of topics for women's studies. It is also a realm in which research positions, perceptions and conclusions can be tested, proved, accepted or rejected. However, this is not a completely one-way relation.

Women's studies have had a positive impact on the Women's Movement in at least in two ways. First, it has equipped the Movement with a scientific foundation that has strengthened the Movement's theoretical understanding of women's activities. Second, by enriching and changing perceptions and regulating the behavior of women and men, this moves the Women's Movement closer to its stated objectives. It is worth noting that the relationship between women's studies research and the Women's Movement is not simply a linkage between theory and practice. The Women's

Movement is based on the revolutionary Marxist-Leninist theory of women's liberation, and women's studies research may help clarify basic theories common for the whole movement. At the same time, researchers can examine and address more deeply concrete issues that are derived from the real lives of women.

In the past, research on women concentrated on women's "*beautiful*" characteristics and highlighted female role models to confirm their important role in labour and the revolutionary movement. However, the study of women at first did not promote research on women's labour, with the exception of several studies on working conditions that more or less covered the basic characteristics of female workers.

Examining this issue in the context of the nation liberation struggle indicates that the Women's Movement had worked out objectives and approaches to meeting them that appeared to have been accepted theoretically and practically. The Women's Movement has enjoyed great support and assistance from the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) and the State, which created favourable conditions for strengthening and increasing its role, and has attracted the participation of women of different classes to reach goals. This truly reflects the wishes and desires of the majority of women.

The environment for research on women has changed much during the transitional economy period. Efforts to increase employment, develop income generation programs, and set up economic assistance programs through providing credit to poor women were first launched in the mid-1980s. These programs, step by step, shifted the focus of the Women's Movement away from political objectives to concrete social and economic issues in the interests of women. This shift calls for a deeper understanding of

women's issues in the changing environment, knowledge that is still at the basic level.

In the meantime, the extended socio-economic crisis has resulted in difficulties in upholding State policies regarding the treatment of women. Issues of gender inequality in employment, income levels, education and training have re-emerged and have become more serious as the economy continues to develop market mechanisms. This situation requires the Women's Movement to be equipped with more scientific arguments and skills in making assessments, developing examples, and gathering the data and information required for the struggle and defense of women's rights and interests. Of note is the fact that the freedom to develop communication, information exchange and co-operation projects and programs between the VWU and international organizations in the 1990s opened up even more opportunities for women's studies. In 1994, for instance, 456 international delegations came to study the activities of the VWU, and 35 new international projects were begun (The Vietnam Woman Union, 1994).

The first women's studies research program was developed in 1984. At first, this program could meet the need for discussion and scholarly exchange with the world. The rapid development of the network of research centers and scientific projects in the 1990s shows that the study of women has been keeping up with changes in the Feminist Movement. Women's studies have been concentrating more and more on the specific issues of women in the new environment.

Examining the women's research and training units in Vietnam and their main research topics will allow us to understand the growing diversity of focuses and aims. The Center for Research

on Women, now The Center for the Study of Families and Women (CSFW) was founded in 1987 under the State Commission of Social Sciences, and is now under Hanoi National Center for the Social Sciences and Humanities. The main research topics and themes at the CSFW include:

- Women and agricultural and rural development projects, including the role of women and the household economy, women and the introduction of machinery, agricultural techniques and technologies, and women in forestry development areas.
- Women workers, working conditions of female workers in the textile industry and women forestry workers.
- Women and families: single women, the education of women and the family, women and ethnic families. In addition, CSFW also covers social policies towards women; women and health care, family planning; women and social evils, and domestic violence.

The CSFW in HCM City was founded in 1991 by the Institute of Social Sciences of HCMC. Its main research topics include female workers in the cities, female workers in joint ventures, and the family life of educated women.

The Center for Gender, Family and Environment in Development (CGFED) was established in 1992. The CGFED is the first women-oriented Vietnamese NGO. This center focuses its research activities on maternal health, women and community medical activities and basic health care.

The Faculty of Women's Studies was established in 1992 at the semi-public Open University in HCMC. The faculty aims to

equip women with new knowledge and skills to strengthen families, help them participate in social and economic development, and encourage them to fight against inequality and violence to preserve human rights and the living environment. The faculty has been conducting its educating and training activities in two stages: (1) Introduction to social sciences, and (2) Specialization in women's studies. The program duration is four years. Students following this course are awarded a bachelor's degree in sociology with a specialization in women's studies. By 1995, the program had already attracted more than 3000 students, among them many women. In addition, the faculty has undertaken 10 short-term training courses to fit the needs of different organizations and agencies.

Some of the research projects carried out by the Faculty include examining the role of women in agriculture in the Mekong delta, Vietnamese women in the transitional economy, credit and savings programs for women in HCMC, and women and scrap collection in HCMC.

The Faculty of Sociology-Psychology was founded at the Hanoi National University of Social sciences and Humanities. Since its formation in 1992, the faculty has been paying great attention to research and education about women. The first master's degrees on women's issues, including topics such as "*Elderly women*" and "*Out-of-wedlock abortions*" were successfully completed here in 1995.

The Center for Women's Research and Training was founded in 1993 in the Pedagogical College of the Hanoi National University of the Social Sciences and Humanities. The Center has been strengthening its efforts to provide information and knowledge about women to trainees and researchers.

The Center for the Study of Female Labour was established in 1994 at the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA). The main research activities of this Center have been concentrated on building up a database on female labor and studying the employment of female workers in state-owned enterprises.

The Central office of the Vietnam Women's Union has recently been researching and suggesting the implementation of several important policies and legal documents about women. This includes, for example, a chapter on Female Labour in the Vietnamese Labour Code, several by-laws of the Civil Law, and Decision 163/HDBT passed in 1988 by the then-Council of Ministers, on the responsibilities of different administrative branches in supporting VWU units at all levels to participate in state management work and decision-making.

Along with these agencies and organizations, it is important to mention several groups involved in researching and teaching about women's issues that are under the auspices of other organizations. These include a team of women's work researchers at HCMC university, a team of gender analysts at the Rice Institute of Mekong Delta, a team of social work researchers in HCMC, and other research projects and programs under different universities such as the Forestry University in HCMC and the Economics University in Hanoi.

What is important is that, regardless of differences in the focus and structure of these organizations, such research and training institutions are able to co-ordinate research, education and training in women's studies.

Women's studies have also been attracting a great number of scientists and managers to undertake research. The research force, which includes both women and men, is concerned with different areas in women's studies, such as women and families, women and labor, women and culture, etc. The results of studies published in different volumes of the Journals of Science of Women show a richness and diversity not only in topics, themes and projects, but also in the many ways issues of the study of are raised and approached. For example, from 1990-1994 there were 60 studies completed by 40 different local and foreign organizations on the theme "women and labour" (Refer to the table of contents, under the section: *Women and Labor, Journal of the Sciences of Women*, 1995).

These studies have examined and analyzed women-related issues in employment, income and working conditions in the transitional economy in urban and rural areas from the point of view of sociology, economics, and gender. This diversity may be seen as one of strengths of women's studies in Vietnam, and may be understood as an effort to approach a variety of issues relating women in practice.

3. Gender and Socio-economic Development

What is GAD (Gender and Development)?

To answer this question, it is necessary to understand the concept "development" and the process of moving theoretically and practically from a discussion of "women in development" to "gender in development". While it is important to keep an eye on the real changes that have been taking place in women's socio-economic lives in last few decades.

By the beginning of the 1960s, the concept of development was appearing in the official documents of international organizations. In 1961, the United Nations declared that 1961-1970 would be the "First Development Decade" (Kabeer, 1994). This declaration and its priorities were shaped by the experiences of the previous decade.

By the end of the first development decade, it was clear that the encouragement of development-led growth had not brought about the desired results. This model of growth was based on the idea that increasing national income was the only requirement for the development of the country. The gains of such growth were to be "shared down" to the household level to those at the lowest rung of the national income distribution scale. The growth-directed model emphasized measures to accelerate the growth rate of the national income at any price. In reality, however, among developing countries that began achieving growth rates of more than 5 % per annum, many began facing problems such as increased unemployment, inequality and absolute poverty. Disappointed with the failure of this development model, many argue that it is necessary to redefine the objective of development so that it can better address the problem of poverty and facilitate the redistribution of wealth to meet the basic needs of all people.

In 1970, the United Nations announced a new Action Strategy: "The ultimate objective of development must be a sustainable, improved livelihood for individuals and the gains of the development must be shared by everybody. If privileges for getting rich quickly and permitting social injustice are maintained, development will fail to reach its important objectives" (Kabeer, 1994).

A change in the perception of development taking place in 1970s at many international organizations made people pay more attention to the relations between economic and social objectives. At the same time, this change created positive conditions for voicing concerns about women's issues.

Two issues related to women that attracted much concern at that time were food and population. (Kabeer, 1994). The Nutrition Commission of FAO, of which the majority of staff members were women, began emphasizing the important role of women in food production, especially in Africa. Thanks to this, the World Food Conference held in 1974 recognized the contribution made by women at every stage of food production, not only at the stage of preparing food for the family.

The second area of concern was population. Regardless of many efforts made to provide family planning education and materials, population growth rates in many developing countries had not decreased. It was also noticed that family planning programs were having very little effect on fertility, if the reasons for having more children were still in place. It was at this point that people began to understand the link between the status of women, including their educational attainment and the degree of their participation in social production, and their fertility rate.

At this stage, studies on women, food and population issues were beginning to make significant contributions to the formation of the theoretical base of women's studies and economic development, as well as to the realization that women's issues have specific implications for development policies. In 1961, the declaration of The Decade of Women officially marked, with official words of equality, peace and development, a new step in understanding Women in Development (WID).

What is noteworthy here is the way women's issues were included in development policies. The approach to this issue in the 1970s seems to have been influenced strongly by the research and work of the previous decade, which focused on women's role in reproduction and raising children, but not on their other labour.

Even though the role of women was beginning to be examined extensively, a comprehensive approach to women's labour outside the family was still lacking. First of all, the role of women in production activities and their contributions to the national economy had not been officially recognized in the exploration of the relationship between women and development. Along with that, researchers and policy-makers were mainly discussing the reproductive role of women in the family as it related to demographic issues, and the issue of raising children as it related to issues of nutrition. Certainly, inferring women's roles from the basis of their re-productive and nurturing roles is one approach, but if the exploration is limited by and ends at that stage, it can not be a direct and comprehensive approach.

Why did researchers choose this approach? By the beginning of 1970s researchers and policy-makers were not aware of women's varied roles, hence, they did not fully recognize the role of women in economic life. That is why *Woman's role in Economic Development*, a book published by Danish economist Ester Boserup in 1970, was considered groundbreaking in its approach to women's roles in economic production. Writing about the life of women in the Western Sahara, Africa, Boserup confirmed the following. (1) Women there had long been the primary food producers, (2) colonial and neo-colonial policies to increase agricultural productivity in that area, which were based on western perceptions of jobs appropriate to women, put men in the dominant positions for

learning new techniques for production. Since that time, the rural areas of Africa began to be divided into two realms: men were linked to modern production and commerce, while women were linked to traditional production. In comparison with the self-sufficient production of before, Boserup concluded, women today are disadvantaged in terms of income, status and power. More importantly, because of this shift, the significant contributions made by women in agriculture became invisible.

Boserup's book was very welcome and widely used as an important tool by "*Women in Development*" supporters in their own work (see Razavi and Miller, 1995). What was most influential was the comprehensive way in which the issue of the role of women and their position in development was clarified, doing away with the idea that women are less "productive" than men and, hence, do not need to be the beneficiaries of welfare programs. In reality, the productive role of women is very significant and therefore, they must be participants like men in socio-economic development programs.

The "*Women in Development*" concept has made much progress in urging development programs to be more concerned with woman's issues, particularly in the establishment of several woman organizations within governments and development agencies around the world (Boserup, 1970). However, some weaknesses in the arguments and methods of the "*Women in Development*" concept have been revealed.

First of all, the "*Women in Development*" concept was criticized for raising woman's issues separately from men's. Women were considered a specific group and the solutions proposed were considered specific for women's case, but an

argument developed that women as a group and their issues could only fully be explained and addressed if they are put in the relation and interaction with men's issues. This requires that, along with putting emphasis on specific points, such as woman's role, it is also important to examine the interaction that is taking place regularly between men and women. One example here is the role of women in providing sustenance. With mother, wife, sister or daughter to do the work of taking care of or feeding the family, the father, husband or sons do not spend much time and energy on this work.

In examining the role of woman in providing sustenance, the fact is that this work is seen as specific to women and, hence, employing measures to ease the work by increasing services or improving home equipment only touches on one formal dimension of the problem. An important and profound dimension of the problem is the understanding of gender relations as one type of social relation. That is, it must be seen how women have been taught to serve men and believe that they could only be "*real*" women if they do this job well. Looking at the details of this problem, it can be seen that the focus here is not on women themselves, but on the maintenance and protection of gender relations in a way that benefits only men. More radical solutions are clearly needed to change social perceptions and encourage men to share housework with women.

The second area of concern about the "*Women in Development*" concept is the objective of integrating women into development. Critics contest that measures to absorb women into development without considering the objective and content of the development are not sufficient. If growth is the first priority and if policy-makers reflect social objectives, then simply "integrating" women into such a development model does not bring about wholly

positive results. Therefore, assessing the development process from the standpoint of the benefit to women is necessary, and integrating them into development needs to be undertaken at the same time as changes and improvements are made in this process.

In looking at these problems, it might be said that the concept of "*Gender and Development*" provides an alternative approach to the "*Women in Development*" concept. "*Gender and Development*" pays more attention to gender relations, i.e. the interactions between women and men, without raising woman's issues separately. "*Gender and Development*" also emphasizes a development model for the benefit of both groups and focuses on the equality and sustainability of development.

In examining the contents of the concept of gender, it can be seen that this area does not only encompass theoretical precepts but a whole set of ideas and instruments that allow for the combination and integration of gender into issues of social and economic development.

The combination of "*Gender and Development*" has been widely used not only in professional journals, but also in the official documents of national as well as international organizations devoted to development issues. This shows how the concept of "*gender*" is penetrating into real life.

However, it must be pointed out that while "*Gender and Development*" has become more and more common terminology, not only in the women's movement but also in the work of development officials and experts, understandings of gender are still varied. Additionally, applying gender as an instrument of policy making is still quite rare (Razavi and Miller, 1995). The use of gender at present is concentrated mainly in development programs

and projects at the concrete level, and exhibit operational features rather than policy characteristics.

What does it mean to integrate gender into development?

When talking about integrating gender into development policies, programs and projects, this means applying the perception and concept of "*gender*" to analyzing and designing development plans and monitoring, supervising and assessing their implementation. Development plans may be located not only in social areas but in different sectors such as economic, technical and legal areas, for example.

The issue of integrating gender into development programs and projects has become the concern of many people in Vietnam. Seminars and discussions about gender issues have been held at different agencies at different levels to explore these issues. These include seminars on "*The Role of Gender and Human Resources in Socio-economic Development Strategies*," held by the Commission on Social Issues of the Office of the National Assembly in February 1995; "*Gender Perception and Planning from the Gender Point of View*," held by the National Commission for the Progress of Women in July 1993; "*Gender and Environment in Development*," organized by The ministry of Science, Technology and Environment in November 1994; "*Women, Men and the Legal System*," held by the Ministry of Justice in April 1994; "*Gender and Sustainable Agricultural Development*," organized by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in December 1994; and other seminars and discussions held by different organizations in other sectors and agencies working on health care and forestry.

Participants at these seminars were mainly policy-makers, managers, professionals and officials from different areas. One question that arises is what persuaded them to gather to talk about issues that at first do not seem to relate to their work? One of the reasons and, at the same time, an interesting finding of these seminars, is that there is a big gap between the perception of woman's role and the reality of planning and professional work at different levels. For example, managers often argue that they do not discriminate against female staff. Policy-makers say that the policies they make are the same for both men and women. Professionals tend to argue that their work does not relate to women. An environmental expert, for example, is often concerned with issues such as urban waste, air pollution in industrial zones, polluted water sources in rural areas, etc. These are seen as entirely professional and technical issues. No reason is seen to link women and gender to these problems, and professionals argue that they have no obligation to be involved in these kinds of movements.

This right direction seems to be analyzing gender relations to create a bridge, or, in other words, to help produce methodologies and skills to link economic and technical programs with the ultimate users: men and women. Obviously, not all seminars were successful and there is no doubt that these seminars are still far from capturing the real situation in Vietnam. It is important to see that different views and points are not new, and that discussions will clear the way for new applications significant for use in practical life.

Because of this, it is necessary to evaluate and propagate the new ideas raised at the recent gender seminars, which few people

know about. We can also let the words of the participants speak for themselves:

"From this workshop, I have learned how to adjust activities in my work as well as in life."

"With an understanding of gender, I can understand more clearly about my job, and I can have a more harmonious division of labour and thereby avoid prejudice against women."

"...Even though a project might have garnered sufficient financial, human and material resources as well as the support of different levels, only by examining gender issues can the effectiveness of it be improved..." (From evaluations made by workshop participants at "Gender and Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development" held in Tuyen Quang province, November 1995, for forestry workers and staff members of the province).

So, how is gender being integrated into professional work and development projects now? These days, experts and researchers and practitioners are doing gender integration in professional work by creating harmony between the needs and interests of women and men in socio-economic development. This method encompasses the task of improving understanding and skills and designing plans to meet the needs of both women and men.

In the area of perception, the concept of gender argues that many current development programs and projects simply forgot or devoted inadequate attention and interest to women's roles. The reasons here are various, but there are two that are major. First, these programs did not pay sufficient attention and interest to the

needs, desires and interests of all participants, men and women. This might be due to bureaucracy or to the inclination to concentrate purely on technical issues. These programs were often subjective and divorced from the reality of the population. Therefore, the interests and needs of women were neglected together with those of men.

The second reason relates to the identification of distinctions in social and economic conditions, including the education, income and job opportunities of women and men. In the minds of many policy-makers, male-female equality is something like viewing women as men; hence, policies made for everybody means policies made for women. Policy-makers, in fact, have not taken into account the reality that women have much less time than men do, they shoulder a heavier housework burden and have fewer opportunities to participate in programs than men do.

Similar policies for both men and women or so-called "neutral policies" have created equality--in document form. Several policies like that, in practice, crowded out women or limited their chances of participating in many social and economic activities. The concept of gender here emphasizes that in undertaking different tasks in life, women and men have quite different needs and interests. Not taking these distinctions into consideration in making policies means widening the gap in opportunities and conditions between women and men.

Recognizing these problems, policy-makers have made efforts to create more opportunities for women. The way that is usually employed is by creating specific policies or programs for women to meet the needs and ensure their interests and benefits.

However, by looking at woman's needs and interests in specific, the physical, financial, as well as human resources set out for these projects or programs often only affects a small part of the problem. In addition, it is often difficult to gain access to all of these resources, and even outright dismissal is a possibility. As a result, these resources have a difficult time bridging the opportunity gap unintentionally created by policies.

In this respect, the concept of gender holds that policies made for women separately can meet only a part of the demand for integrating them into development. For people to be the number one factor in development, policies and regulations should be made in a way that can create the same opportunities for both men and women. Only this logic can ensure the increased participation of men and women in social activities and support the full development of their roles and abilities.

Regarding specific means and measures for making relevant policies and better meeting gender needs, it is important to discover and interpret correctly the differences in the lives of men and women. These differences may be in the way they are involved in production activities, the reproduction of labour resources, or social activities. Though both men and women are doing these same work, they may have differences in the right to make decisions, access resources, share gains, etc. Full consideration of these differences and the development of appropriate measures for each gender group through policies can create equal opportunities and benefits for women and men.

Let's turn to the example of the environment. Professionals who integrate gender will see that both women and men are affected by environmental pollution, albeit differently. Besides this, they may be engaged in producing or increasing pollution levels differently as well. Policies regarding the environment may be more practical and realistic if they fully understand these differences. At this point, the concern with women is not about feminism but how to increase the effectiveness of policy.

By now, many development programs have been designed based on the method of "*planning to meet gender needs.*" The main content of this method is the development of strategic plans based on meeting the specific needs of men and women in a concrete context. Gender has been used here in practice as a method of making and assessing a policy, program or project. This has given birth to new perspectives on improving the role of women to make social progress and assure sustainable development for the benefit of both women and men.

However, it is necessary to stress that even though the gender concept is now more widely used in policy documents and at different forums, the application, basically, is still limited to development projects at the program level. One remaining objective is to apply this gender concept in making comprehensive and long-lasting policies at the macro level not only in Vietnam but also in other countries.

4. Transition from "Women in Development" to "Gender and Development"

After all that has been presented in the previous section, two remarks will be made here. First, by now, it is clear that women's problems have been addressed by combining both concepts of "*Women in Development*" (WID) and "*Gender and Development*" (GAD) at different intensities and at different times. Second, the shifting from "*Women in Development*" to "*Gender and Development*", as a legal mode for addressing women's and gender problems and to construct a civilized and just society should be considered a worthwhile process.

The concept "*Women in Development*," as mentioned above, has only emphasized the extensive and important role of women in the construction of the country and economic growth. In fact, women are an engine and a force that need to be absorbed into social and economic development. However, this concept is limited to laying down women's problems into an already existing framework. This is reflected in how women are mobilized and attracted to implement economic development goals. The self-selection of objectives and the deciding of priorities and planning of development in the interest of women and men has not yet been covered, and the concept of "*Women in Development*" has not focused on this dimension. Woman's issues have just been "*mentioned*", "*taken into account*" or "*integrated*" into development programs, projects. In reality, this concept has not raised the question of women as a subject of socio-economic development. This does not only limit the ability to encourage the activities and

creativity of women but also reduces the social effectiveness of economic development. Therefore, it must be said that it is still difficult to attain sustainable socio-economic development.

The concept of "*gender and development*" underlined right at the beginning the organic relation between women, development, economic growth and social development. Moreover, this concept has emphasized the importance of including women as a subject in policy-making and implementing and the monitoring and evaluation of socio-economic development objectives.

The social and economic reform period in Vietnam (*Đoi Mới*) has been creating great opportunities for changing perceptions and moving from WID to GAD. The fact that male and female workers are free in choosing jobs and occupations is one example. In particular, creative women are overcoming difficulties and quickly re-entering the busy private economic sector. Another example is how the activities of the women's movement have been responding more and more to the needs and interests of women. Many business projects set out objectives right from the start and worked out measures to meet the needs of both men and women. This example illustrates the concept of gender and development in action. However, this is still a broad application of the concept, in that the recommendations to expand opportunities for women so they can develop themselves still tend to be somewhat general.

The fact that development has been examined more and more significantly in sustainable and profound terms is a specific feature of the concept of gender and development in action. On the one

hand, the necessity of meeting gender needs has been raised at macro level, such as in social and economic policies, programs and projects. On the other hand, development agencies have also begun to concentrate on group, family and individual levels. This enables development entities to focus on how to develop new habits, norms and values to significantly change perceptions of gender--as the ground for the building a more just and civilized society.

Moving from "*Women in Development*" to "*Gender and Development*" enables changes to be made not only in development policy and the Women's Movement but also in women's studies as a new area of research and teaching. Recent research on women has revealed and clarified women's and men's issues in socio-economic development. At present, women's studies research is not limiting itself to interpreting and motivating women to participate in social and economic activities, but is also expanding its scope to explore the impact of socio-economic changes on the employment, income and living conditions of women. At the same time, the social and economic effectiveness of development programs is being assessed from the perspective of gender to understand how to use women's needs as the basis for future policy making and how to meet the needs of gender researchers who are studying the employment, income, education, skill level, and health of women.

Policy analysis from a gender point of view is a promising research tendency. There is an increasing number of development programs and projects taking as much as possible data and information of women's issues into consideration. Strategic and practical today needs of women are being studied in order to be met

by measures suggested by researchers and policy makers. By involving and contributing new ideas and insights to development programs the science of women and women's movement continue to move further in a long way to gender justice and equality.

PART II

THE POSITION AND ROLE OF WOMEN IN SOCIO - ECONOMIC RENOVATION

CHAPTER 4

WOMEN IN A MARKET ECONOMY

1. Women's Studies and Economics

Labour, employment and income represent the main concepts of economics. Economics studies issues of production and reproduction, labour, employment and occupation mainly from the perspective of economic effectiveness. A purely economic theoretical perception, for example as found in radically academic economics, stands in a relatively different position to women's studies as well as to other social issues. Only one of a dozen articles about policies and experiences published by *Economic Studies* from 1983-1993 is about female labour.

The market economy seems to be well situated to enhance the flexibility of the individual worker and yet, at the same time, it also generates and sharpens several problems of male-female and gender inequality. This should cause economists to pay more attention to women's problems. Books about economic reforms in Vietnam in recent years have begun to include chapters and sections on women's problems (Vu Tuan Anh, 1995).

Setting aside all social issues of gender characteristics, it will be surprising for many people to learn that modern economics does not go much further than the classical economics developed by Adam Smith (1732-1790) at the end of 18th century. Indeed, today a market economic system with all its fatal attractions mainly relies on laws that were discovered long ago. They include the law of demand and supply, the law of surplus, etc. In their turn, economic laws are generally based on psychological principles of "reward and punishment," which influence the behaviour of every individual. That is, an individual independently makes decisions and behaves in a way to gain maximum satisfaction, and seeks for means to avoid punishment at any price. Prices are understood as one reliable indicator of the demands and desires of consumers. In a market economy, producers and businessmen must be in tune with the choices and behaviour of customers. All that customers want is then produced at minimum cost for a margin of profit.

Based on primary assumptions about the rational choices of individuals, a market economy seems to assure its own effectiveness through: (1) creating a variety of products and goods to satisfy the demands of consumers; (2) utilizing to the utmost all social and natural resources and (3) ensuring availability and flexibility to customers when making choices.

There are arguments for and a belief in the influence of the "invisible hand," i.e. that the market mechanism automatically brings about social justice and male-female equality, but every lesson and experience of the most developed and fastest-growing market economies show the opposite. That is, a market economy always needs a "visible hand" in terms of a legal framework, policies and regulations produced by the state management apparatus.

Unlike an economics that mainly studies gender issues to achieve short-term high economic effectiveness, women's studies of economics looks at issues of labour, employment and income, aiming at improving social benefits in the long-term as measured by standards of social justice, civilization and advancement for every female and male individual.

Gender issues in Economics. An analysis done on economic phenomena via women's studies points out the shortcomings of economics in recognizing and fully assessing women's issues in a market economy. One of the related failures of economics is its narrowness; it tends to be full of prejudice, even in its basic concepts. Let's take the concept of labour as an example.

Economics considers social production as the unification of two P-processes: production and reproduction. Producing material values and reproducing the labour force represent two independent, complementary components of one process. To maintain production, the labour force must be replenished. To have a labour force, there must be biological reproductive processes; i.e. the reproduction of human beings. Theoretically, this issue does not lead to any dispute. However, as we go into the details of economics, such as employment, the above theoretical ground enables discriminating treatment. At this time, in the perceptions as well as in the calculations of economists, there is only the productive process. Labour reproduction "suddenly" becomes economically meaningless, or more precisely, is of little economic significance.

According to all kinds of definitions proposed by labour economists, housework and raising children are not "jobs". What are these activities then? Economists surely see having a child as part of the natural continuum. As long as it is natural, it is free of charge, and, hence, it is not a job. However, the philosophy of

economists is not consistent. In the case where a man hires a woman to do his housework and prepare meals for him, then this work comes to have economic import. By this logic, if this woman marries the man, her income will disappear although the work will continue (Pigou, 1995). The key point of the concept "labour" is not the nature of the labour but the income. This issue, however, is raised only in regard to raising and taking care of children and the family.

A self-sufficient farmer, however, is not paid and yet is still considered an economic actor. On the contrary, the work of a woman who stays at home to do housework does not have any economic significance and she herself is not considered a working person. Thus, the concept of "natural" employment is very vague and bolstered by existing prejudice against women.

Not only employment but also "value"--another important concept in economics--contains similar shortcomings. We all understand value, as economists have explained it, to include exchange value and disposable value. Anything that can be exchanged for another thing is considered to have exchange value. What cannot be exchanged but is usable is counted as having only utility. For example, air cannot be exchanged for other things but is useful hence it has use value. In practice, economists are only concerned with what is exchangeable and has real value. Thus, although we all hear that children are our future and ensure the prosperity of nation, they only have real value if they are sold (!). If anyone says that children are his or her joy and whole life, then he or she surely is not an economist as "joy" and "life" do not have economic significant and cannot be exchanged.

Similarly, there are a lot of other things that are important and significant, such as health, knowledge, social relations, and time for

friends and relatives. The value of all these cannot be measured by exchange value. Looking at things from the perspective of exchange value, economics becomes shortsighted and narrow in its "objective" evaluation of issues relating to manpower development, sustainable development and equality between social groups, especially for women.

Certainly, many argue and hold that it is not important what economists think about a subject but how the rest of us look at it. This means that it is not important that economists consider housework as useful for the national income, but that every one of us values that work and pays adequate attention to it.

This raises two issues that are related to each other. First, the standard of "exchange value" in economics has been accepted as the only one. Second, that economic standard has a significant impact on the behaviour and choices of every individual, as well as on the society. We all know that the prioritizing and decision-making (about valuable things) done by every woman does not concern economists at all, but on the contrary, many women have to adjust their behaviour to what has been defined as the standards and norms by economists. For example, in choosing to stay at home to do housework, a woman cannot avoid developing an inferiority complex and thinking of herself as subordinate, unemployed, having no contribution to make economically and, to some extent, having no usefulness to society. In addition to feeling subordinate, in many cases they have to confront the scornful looks that come from neglected members of the family, friends and society. However, it is not only true for women but for the society. Non-productive spheres are neglected. Health care and education are often the sectors that are subject to budget cuts first when the economy falls into stagnation.

The problem is that if the above standards are not appropriate, then how can they be changed? Suppose there were no difference between "exchange value" and "un-exchange value," that one-hour spent doing housework could be considered as significant as one hour spent working at a factory. This might be too simple a method to calculate national income. However, if human development were the first goal, it would be difficult to argue that time spent on producing goods has more value than time spent taking care of and feeding people.

A manpower development report by the UNDP estimated that unpaid work done by women and men at present would add up to US\$16 billion for the whole world if it were counted at the market rate, with women's portion making up US\$11 billion (Pigou, 1995). However, the question "how it should be changed?" is still found in the report. Women's studies of economics has laid down the initial basis for a new and more comprehensive perception of the economic role of women and their contribution to general socio-economic development (Waring, 1995).

2. Women in a Market Economy: Winners and Losers

One of the questions, which are often raised in the study of transitional economies, is whether women lose or gain in the shift to a market economy. This question has already been raised for women in China, the former Soviet Union and Eastern European countries. This question is also a concern of researchers in Vietnam.

The shift from a centrally planned, subsidized economy to a market economy operating via state regulations and oriented toward socialism has generated fundamental changes in Vietnam. There

have been a number of studies and evaluations on the achievements of the reforms. There have also been analyses, reports on limitations, and discussions of the negative points of these reforms on the social and economic life of the people. However, up to present, there has not been a comprehensive study demonstrating the achievements and problems of women and the women's movement in the past. This topic might become the concern of researchers and feminists in the future.

Assessing the success of the reform and renovation policies from the point of view of women is not an easy task. Besides the difficulties resulting from insufficient information sources, there are also problems in approaching this study. Raising the question of "losing" or "winning" seems to be acceptable at first, because it allows direct comparison and concrete remarks. However, this way of raising the question does not seem to avoid the typical, purely market-oriented and economic point of view. In a market economy, the "glasses" that are usually used to examine things are likely to be focused only on "gain" and "loss", because, in shifting to a new economic system, every woman, everyday can feel that they are gaining and losing. It becomes more complicated to do an evaluation on a group of women or on different groups of them. Some groups of individuals may gain more than they may lose, and others may lose more than they gain. Life is very diverse and relations are fluid, making a comprehensive and generalized view very difficult.

One of the approaches that might be applied here would be to examine these issues from different perspectives. For example, a comparison might be made with the situations, conditions and

position of women at the present time with women under the subsidized system in the past. There might also be a comparison of the possibilities and opportunities that the transitional economic mechanisms have brought about for women and for men.

There might be different points of view, and such research also needs time and serious investment to produce more satisfactory answers. However, if a test were done by asking rural and urban women questions about the differences they see now compared to what they saw in the past before renovation began, it may be assumed that women have gained more than they have lost so far. These gains might be freedom in choosing jobs and migrating to fit their needs, it might be the possibility of starting up different economic activities as they wish, it might be an opportunity for exchanging and mastering necessary information about production and consumption. However, if more questions were asked about the comparison of these gains with men's, the answers might be different. It seems that women have to carry more of the burden of the transitional period than men do and enjoy fewer benefits of the reforms than men do. A comprehensive study may need to concretize the above assumptions and seek concrete answers for each group of women. It might happen that urban young women who know foreign languages and are sensitive to change, female entrepreneurs, and educated women will seize opportunity more so than old, ill and low-skilled and uneducated women will. Rural women, especially those living in remote areas who have many children, lack land and are ill, may constitute the most vulnerable group of women in the transitional economy.

3. Job Opportunities and Labour Division

Vietnamese women made up 52% of the total labor force in 1989. In the labor structure, women concentrate in female sectors such as agriculture (75.6%), trade, education and health care but not in men's sectors such as construction – 1% (Table 4.1).

In agriculture, female labour makes up 75.6% of the total, while in construction women workers only make up 1%. In addition, trading, education and health care sectors attract high rates of female labour (Table 4.1).

In 1994, women workers numbered 18,396,000 persons, or 52.5% of the total labour force. Their participation rate in economic activities was 71%; that is, out of 100 persons aged 13-55, 71 women participated in economic activities. The 1998 labor structure tends to reduce number of the agriculture workers and its share, although it still accounted for 66% of the total labor force. But the number of workers in the service and industry sectors increases gradually and reaches 21% and 13% respectively. Women are predominant in the trade and service labor force

In 1998, women make up 50% (or 18.703 million people) of the total labor force. The women participation is 71%; that is, in every 100 women aged 15 or above there are 71 workers engaged in economic activities.

These numbers do not only indicate the significant role of women, but also allow us to see that women have been shoulder to shoulder with men in all work fronts.

Table 4.1. Population at 13 and above age working in the national economy, and gender rates by sector, 1989

Economic sectors	Gender structure, %			Sector structure, %		
	Total, (000)	Female	Male	Total, %	Female	Male
Total	28791	52	48	100	100	100
Manufacturing	3014	43	57	10.5	8.6	12.5
Construction	540	27	73	1.9	1.0	2.8
Agriculture	21226	53	47	73.4	75.6	71.6
Forestry	129	42	58	0.4	0.4	0.6
Transport	469	15	85	1.6	0.4	2.9
Post, Communication	35	43	57	0.1	0.1	0.1
Trading, Input supply	1650	71	29	5.7	7.8	3.5
Other productive activities	13	38	62	0.0	0.0	0.1
Housing, tourism, sanitation	150	49	51	0.5	0.5	0.6
Research,	44	36	64	0.2	0.1	0.2
Education	722	66	34	2.5	3.2	1.8
Culture, arts	53	33	67	0.2	0.1	0.3
Health care, Social insurance, sport	224	64	36	0.8	1.0	0.6
Credit, finance, state insurance	89	52	48	0.3	0.3	0.3
State management	279	32	68	0.3	0.2	0.8
Non-material production	89	32	68	0.3	0.2	0.4
Not-defined	66	46	54	0.2	0.2	0.3

Source: GSO, Population census 1989, Data on women of Vietnam, 1985-1994, Hanoi, 1995.

This also tells us about male-female inequality in labour relations and employment. However, is it true that women and men have the same labour and job opportunities? Do women have the opportunity to chose the jobs they want and need? In reality, have job opportunities for women increased or decreased in the context of economic reforms?

To answer these questions, a more accurate explanation of the phenomenon of female labour concentration in certain areas and trades is required. One of the important reasons for this phenomenon is due to the stereotypical perception of women's role and functions.

In traditional thought and perception, the task of caring for the home, first of all, is women's. Women do not only give birth to and raise children; they have to fulfil the role of "interior marshall" and "housekeeper". That means women manage, look after and do all of the housework. Moreover, as the family in Vietnam is becoming an economic unit these days, women also become an important and even main source of income for the family (Le Ngoc Hung).

Because of the duty before herself and the family, a woman, on the one hand, cannot spend much time and money on training and improving her skill level. On the contrary, she has often has to take into consideration her family condition when making a choice of job and occupation. An "appropriate" job means one that allows her to generate income for her and her family and, at the same time, does not require a high skill level and leaves her enough time for housework.

Conditions, skill levels, time and other factors prevent them from looking for good jobs and choosing well. As a result, female workers are usually absorbed into low-demand fields and sectors,

low wage jobs, and hard and dirty work. In the textile and garment making industries, for example, 70% of workers in production workshops are women, 100 % in pre-schools; 80% in primary education schools; 81% in health care as medical nurses, while only 17% of workers in electronics are women.

The job situation will become tenser as industrialization and modernization are accelerated, as this process will require higher skill levels and qualifications. As a result, there will be a shortage of well-trained labourers and a redundancy of low-skilled ones. This tendency may be more sharpened for female labour.

Before we proceed to the clarification of job and income for rural and urban women nowadays, it is necessary to make a distinction between the application of the following concepts.

Employment may be understood as a sort of professional work aimed at bringing about material and moral benefits for the society and income for the individual worker and his or her family.

A person who does not have a job is called *unemployed*; that is, this is a person who is able to work and has skills and the need for a job, but, because of some reason at the time of survey, he or she does not have one.

A person who does not have a full-time job belongs to another group. She may not have the opportunities and conditions to be employed full time and may lack skills as well as his experience; thus, she may have low labour productivity and income.

4. Employment and Income of Rural Women

The tendency toward the feminization of farming labour

In Vietnam, an underdeveloped agricultural-based country, 78% of working age labourers are found at present in rural areas,

and 60% of these are women. Therefore, any change taking place in the structure, techniques or organization of the agricultural sector relates to the socio-economic life of more than half of Vietnam's population, especially women.

Perhaps because of decades of war and social change in Vietnam, a perception that is taken for granted is that women's labour in rural areas always accounts for more than men's. For the last few years, female labour has been increasing significantly, in both absolute numbers and in relative figures. Female farming labour engaged 11.1 million persons in 1989, while only 9.9 million men did this work. By 1992, these numbers reached 12.4 and 10.9 respectively. Compared to the total female labour force in the whole economy, female labour in agriculture made up 75.6% in 1989 and increased to 79.9% in 1992, while male labour did not change much during the same period (GSO, 1993). In 1998, female labor force in rural areas is 14.98 million people or 80% of the total labor force (GSO, 1999)

A relative increase in female labour in recent years, has been the result of, first of all, a natural increase in the population reaching working age. About 900.000 people join the labour force every year in rural areas. Among these, female labour accounts for 53%.

The second reason for the increase is due to the restructuring and reorganization of the state-owned economic sector. Since 1991, there had been about a 70% worker redundancy rate in the state sector, with many coming back to rural areas and the agriculture sector, and women make up the majority as their job opportunities in cities and towns are becoming rarer than men's.

The third reason is the collapse of the eastern European market system in the early 1990s. A large number of handicraft co-operatives and enterprises manufacturing exports for this market

have shut down. Furthermore, as they are less competitive under the market economy, businesses located in rural areas have fallen into marginal and bankruptcy situations. As a result, workers--mainly women--had nowhere to turn but to farming.

Along with this, labour moving from rural to urban areas at off-season times is mainly men. Women, especially those, who have families and children, have to stay to work on land assigned to the household and operate the household economic activities.

All of these factors lead to the situation in which the agricultural labour force has increased substantially and female labourers are tending to dominate the structure of this work force.

Fewer employment choices for women

Due to the fast population growth rate in Vietnam during the last few decades, per capita land area is low and has decreased much in recent years. In the Red River Delta, for example, per capita land area was 689 square meters in 1990, only 37 % of what it was in 1930 (Dao The Tuan, 1993).

Lack of land, overpopulation and insufficient employment force women, especially poor ones, to accept any job offered to them at any wage. Many women have to work overtime and work hard in harmful and toxic conditions and environments dangerous to their health. Along with this, due to low demand, a tendency to hire, exploit and abuse female labour has emerged and is increasing at many workplaces and organizations.

Working for others for money in rural areas is not a new phenomenon or trend. About 30.1% of households try to regulate and employ idle labourers by finding work and working for others (Tuong Lai, 1991). Some farmers have to work for others because they do not have enough land or none at all. What deserves

attention here is that the number of full-time hired labourers in several places is on the increase. Among hired workers, women work for the lowest wages and they are the most abused and the most dependent on employers. As a result, they often fall into difficult situations, such as being overloaded and having to live separately from the family, being undervalued and being exploited.

At several places, 30-100% of the land of farmers has been taken back by the local authorities as the farmers could not fulfil the contract assignments for output. For example, 19% of households are short of land or landless in Dong Thap province, 12-13% in Kien Giang, and 6-7 % in Tra Vinh, An Giang and Soc Trang provinces (Hoang Hien and Tran Vinh, 1995). What is noteworthy is that most of these households are female-headed and have many children and poor health conditions.

The lack of employment and low wages, especially in comparison with urban areas, results in increased rural-urban labour mobility to seek jobs. Although small compared to men, the number of female labourers joining this stream has been increasing recently due to the increased demand for simple, non-skilled and low-wage work in cities. Studies of this trend indicate that up to 70% of a total of 815 rural women surveyed want their sons to move to the city to search for a job. For daughters, this rate is 68% (Hoang Hien and Tran Vinh, 1995). The shortage of employment and low paid jobs are pushing farmers to move to urban areas with higher paid jobs. As officially estimated, 300-400 thousands farmers move to cities for making life each year, for example, in 1998 there were 309,444 migrants from rural to urban, of which 37% were women (GSO, 1999). The number of female migrants is likely to increase due to pulling factors of available higher-pay jobs in cities. This tendency is accompanied with the parents' expectation that their children will

move to cities for work. A survey of 815 farmer women shows that 70% of respondents wished their sons would move to the city for employment and 68% respondents gave the same answer in regard to their daughters (Tuong Lai, 1991).

According to a preliminary study, most rural women migrating to cities work as street vendors, garbage collectors, maids, and hired labourers. A large number work at restaurants, beer stands and cafes at low wages. What raises concern is that most rural women are young girls, aged 13-15, and unmarried. Because of the imperfect labour market and the lack of information, knowledge, reliable lodgings and legal security, these people are easily attracted to and involved in social evils and add to the increasing number of prostitutes and victims in the cities.

This is a real concern if one looks at the situation of other countries in the region. Thailand, for example, provides a typical example of female labour rural-urban mobility, especially to "hot points" in big cities. The number of Thai rural females quitting villages for cities from 1979-1989 was 53% higher than it was for men. It is estimated that as many as 2 million women migrated during that time. Most of them were absorbed into tourist-related industries and services (Karnjananksorn, 1994).

Diversified Employment and labour characteristics

The assignment of land use rights to households in rural areas has contributed substantially to liberating the labour of millions of peasants, creating conditions for rural women to actively seek employment. However, changes in the employment structure in terms of diversifying trades and activities are taking place slowly and unequally. The results of a survey on 6,457 households by the GSO, for example, show that 87% of households in Hoang Lien Son province work full-time,

while 10% is mixed, but these figures are 51.3% and 47.7% respectively in Binh Dinh province (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2. Farming household structure by business area in 5 provinces, 1990

Provinces Areas	Hoang Lien Son	Ha Nam Ninh	Binh Dinh	Dac Lac	Hau Giang	For all 5 provinces
Full-time farming	87.03	64.36	51.27	81.09	73.61	70.38
Handicraft	1.05	0.69	0.68	0.04	5.94	1.91
Trade & services	2.79	0.23	0.33	0.19	1.08	0.69
Mixed	10.13	34.42	47.72	18.3	19.37	27.02

Source: *The Central Committee of Agriculture, Social and Economic Development in rural areas of Vietnam, Hanoi, 1991*.

After half a decade the 1997 labor-employment structure experiences much change in terms of decreasing rate of specialized farming households from 70% in 1990 to 62% in 1997. The rate of out-farm households engaging in processing, industry, construction and services increased three times and reached 11% in 1997 (Table 4.3).

The poor condition of technical and technological equipment as well as poorly developed infrastructure in rural area reveals the serious problem of primitive and hard work for the migrating women involved. In particular, the quantity of farming tools, equipment, and machines such as tractors, pumping machines, pesticides and chemical fertilizers decreased steadily from 1985 to 1990 (Table 4.4).

Table 4.3. The structure of farmer households by occupations and regions, 1997, %

Household	North	South	All
Farming	67,8	59,1	62,2
Mixed farming	23,9	27,9	26,5
Out-farming	8,3	13,0	11,3
in which:			
- Agriculture processing	1,9	2,0	2,0
- Industry & Construction	3,5	3,8	3,7
- Service	2,9	7,2	5,6
Total	100	100	100

Source: *The Central Department of Agriculture. Socio-economic situation in rural areas of Vietnam. Hanoi, 1991, p. 55*

Table 4.4. Physical and technical base in agriculture, 1985-1993

	1985	1990	1991	1992	1993
Tractors (piece)	31620	25086	35375	37627	37000
Pumps	188631	168145	198334	225443	225500
Power for agriculture (mill. Kw)	308.5	586.8	807.4	975	1000
Chemical fertilizer (,000 tons)	1818.9	2643.5	3165.6	3238.8	3250
Pesticides					
- Locally produced	17.8	9.2	12.8	8.0	10
- Imported	16.7	9.0	22.5	15.3	15

Source: *GSO, Agriculture of Vietnam, 1945-1995, Hanoi, 1995.*

Industrial goods, as well as the production of the capital goods of agriculture, increased in early 1990, but afterward it stopped and recently appears to be decreasing. In 1999, 12.7 million farmer households had 26,204 tractors of all kinds, 75,721 farm tractors and 129,887 ploughing machines. This means that every 485 households share one tractor, 168 households share a farm-tractor and 98 households share one ploughing machine (Table 4.5).

Table 4.5. Technical items used by farm households in 1999

Items	Total number	Households/one item
Tractor	26204	485
Farm tractor	75721	168
Boat and ships	267488	47
Ploughing machine	129887	98
Rice cleaner	223303	57
Milling machine	191941	66
Pumps	1288913	10

Source: Calculated from 1999 Population Census.

This is a troubling development for both the industrial and agricultural growth of the economy in the future. Labour-intensive and low-productivity agriculture is hardly able to free up part of its human resources to support the demand for the development of industry.

Studies on rural women show that the average working time of a woman in rural areas is 12.5 hours per day. This figure is often higher at harvest time and lower during the time between crops and

also varies from region to region. A female worker in the North, northern-central and mountainous areas often works 14 hours a day. Single, poor women usually have to work more hours, usually not less than 16 hours a day.

The data obtained from large-sample and large-scale surveys on the rural employment situation also indicate that the number of non-farm days in the year is quite high. For example, it is 135 days in Thai Binh province, 116 in Nam Ha province, and 175 days in Nha Trang province. A survey done in several communes in Tu Liem, a suburb of Hanoi where there are various off-farm activities, shows that 20% of respondents lack employment in non-crop months and women make up 60% of the underemployed.

Data obtained from surveys of rural employment show that the number of under-employed days is large in rural areas. For example, the 1998 Living Standard Survey indicates that the rate of farmers working less than 40 hours a week decreased slowly from 71% in 1993 to 61% in 1998. In the same period, the number of farmers working more than 50 hours/week increased from 12% to 20%. It is worth noting that of the hard working farmers there are 55-58% women (Table 4.6).

Table 4.6. Working hour in rural areas, 1993-1998, %

Hours /week	1993	1998
1-15	14	12
16-39	57	49
40-50	17	18
More than 50	12	20
Total	100	100

Source: World Bank. *Vietnam Development Report 2000. Attacking Poverty.*

The above numbers raise an important question: do women, in fact, lack work, or are they overburdened? To be able to answer this question requires a better understanding of the labour characteristics of women. The jobs rural women usually do are mainly full-time farming activities, off-farm and housework.

Agricultural production is of a seasonal nature and, therefore, there is non-crop time. However, this is relative depending on the number of crops in the year and the turnover of land. Therefore, for rural women the concept of "non-crop time" is not only relative in nature but also symbolic in nature. In fact, during this time, they simply stop doing some kinds of work to do other kinds. Ms Lu, a female-farmer living in Cam Thuy, Thanh Hoa province, described her working day during non-crop time as follows. "After finishing transplanting the rice, I go to the hills to clear land and grow cassava, and then I come back to clear weeds in the rice field. At the break, I go for fuel and wood and go home to make alcohol from waste and feed the animals." When a woman is involved in farming, raising animals and food processing activities, it is hard to talk with them about non-crop time.

Most off-farm activities, like embroidery, petty trading, and farm product processing, bring in low and uncertain income. Women accept most of these jobs, as they do not have other choices. However, though important, time-consuming and hard for them and their families, these are still not considered jobs. By habit and long-standing perception, they are thought of as "minor", "uncountable," and not "real" work.

The nature and characteristics of housework indicate that rural women are overloaded by productive and low wage jobs and, at the same time, there are presently too few choices for them, especially for high wage jobs. This also reveals a big difference

between women and men in the demand and possibility of looking for jobs. Due to too much work and, hence, too much time spent on work; women have little chance to seek new job opportunities. Family duties also make it impossible to find and maintain a secure and well-paid job.

In short, the renewal of the economic management mechanism in agriculture has been creating conditions for women to take full advantage of their active role in economic activities, but job opportunities and the content and nature of women's labour in rural areas have not been improved accordingly to support them.

Income and the value of women's labour

The trend of polarized income among women. It should be noted that thanks to the active participation and enthusiasm of women's labour in the development of the household economy, the income of women and their families has increased substantially. According almost all surveys done in rural areas, about 70% of female respondents say that their income and their family's income has increased significantly in the last few years. For women who have stable jobs, engaged either in trading, sales, or services, the income level is rather high, much higher than that of full-time female farmers. However, looking at the general pattern, the income of rural women is much lower than men's and the average level of the society.

As noted before, full-time female farmers, currently making up more than half of the rural female labour force, often have the lowest level of income. Many of our studies carried out in the period 1992-93 in the northern and central parts of the country indicate that a full-time female farmer often has an income level of 65,000 VND a month. Compared to the average income level a female worker in a factory, which is 164,000 VND per month, and

to an employee in private business, 144,000 VND per month, the income level of a female farmer is still the lowest.

In rural areas, single women (which includes widowed, divorced, and separated women) have the lowest income. The results of a survey done in Hai Trung commune, Hai Hau, Nam Ha province in 1993 show that up to 40% of single women live in hunger and poverty, while this rate for other kinds of families is 25%. A similar situation may be found among female workers in forestry. According to the data from a survey carried out at two forestry farms in Doan Hung, Vinh Phu province and Ham Yen, Tuyen Quang province, the per capita income of a single-female family is 30-40,000 VND a month. While the rate for other families is about 100,000 VND a month (Thanh Tam, 1994).

According to the 1989 population census, 1.9 million women became widows at an early age in the rural areas of Vietnam. The number of divorced and unmarried women was five times higher than it was for men. The income level and living conditions of this group constitute a serious problem and the concern of society.

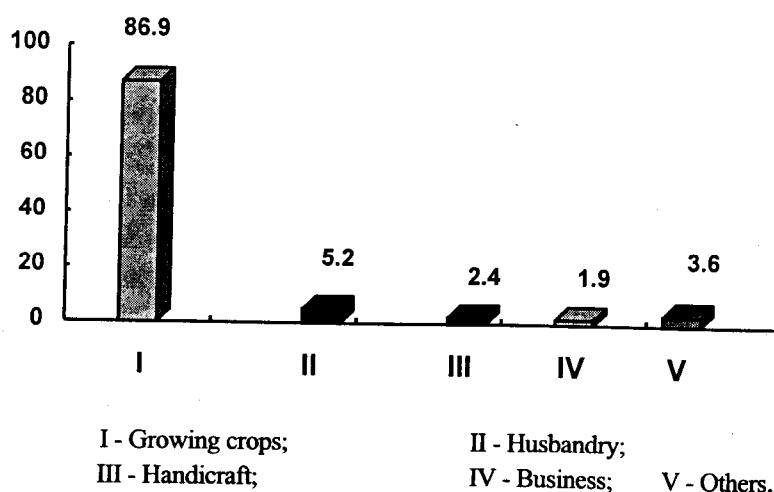
Part-time female farmers have small portions of land and unstable off-farm jobs, with the main source of income coming from growing crops such as rice, maize, cassava, and sweet potato. The income level of this group is not much higher than that of full-time female farmers. Our study done in Phu Tuc commune, Phu Xuyen, Ha Tay province in 1992 revealed that 91.4% of female farmers said that they are involved in off-farm activities but that their main source of income is still farming. This makes up 86.9% of the total family income (Figure 4.1).

Thus, we can see that, in a market economy, female farmers are very active in the economic field and in starting supplementary

off-farm activities, however, the income generated from these activities is still insignificant.

Low payment for female labour. The wage earned by a woman for one day's labour in the rural areas is very low at the present time. Women who were asked in our studies in 1993 indicated that the rate earned for one day of farming was 5 kg of paddy at most, that is, about 5-6,000 VND. For an off-farm working day, excluding traditional industries or large-scale trading activities, the rate was lower or similar to that of a day spent farming. For example, a woman's wages for a day's work knitting nets is 3,000 VND in Dai Mo commune, Tu Liem, Hanoi; making noodles and alcohol, almost the same. One day spent carrying earth in Cam Thuy, Thanh Hoa province in February 1994 earned 3,000 VND and one meal.

Figure 4.1. Income structure of female workers and their families in Phu Tuc commune, Ha Tay province, %



At non-crop time, female farmers are often involved in garbage collection, cutting wood, making cakes and biscuits, picking bamboo shoots, etc. However, these jobs are uncertain and generate little income.

At present, only 22.4% of rural household labour is financially capable of producing commercial agricultural products, while 14.8% of households are using basic farming tools for self-sufficient but low level production. The remaining 62.8% have started commercial agricultural production and are demanding improved and modern machines and equipment (Nguyen Dieu, 1993). Recently, many farmer households profitably do business by applying new equipment, technology and access to the domestic markets. These farmers create new jobs for workers and migrants in localities. For example, a worker hired by coffee planting farmers in Tay Nguyen is paid as high as 20,000 VND/a day in 1999.

Women's income level is lower than men's are. In talking about the daily earnings of women in rural areas, it is impossible not to mention one fact, that women's work is often cheaper than men's are. This is clearly seen through a comparison of the monthly wage of a man with that of a woman on average, the monthly wage of a woman is of 65% of the wage of a man doing the same job. The average wage of a female worker in rural areas varies from region to region, but is still 20-40% lower than a man's (4.7).

Table 4.7. Average monthly wage of men and women and the rate of women's income, by regions, in thousands VND

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
Female	48.4	63.3	48.2	82.3	82.1	111.5	64.8	67.8
Male	59.8	74.6	60.9	104.3	120.4	183.7	111.4	97.9
Female/male wage (%)	81	85	79	78	68	60	58	69

Source: GSO, *Data from survey on Population living standards, 1992-93, Hanoi, 1994*

Note: 1: Northern mountain and midlands

2: Red River Delta

3: Old region 4

4: Central coast

5: Highlands

6: Southeast

7: Mekong Delta

A survey done in Tu Liem district reveals that among women who rely only on full-time off-farm activities as their only source of income, 39% of respondents said that the main reason for the poorly developed household economy was due to insufficient investments. But 30% said it was due to limited production means and markets.

Thus, investments have an important role in generating additional income for female farmers and their families. Though more than 50% of households have access to formal credit at many places, in rural areas, however, banking services and credit have not reached people who are in need of it (Tran Thi Van Anh, 1994). In remote, highland, coastal and island areas, banking services and financial institutions are still poorly developed and those available are in no position to serve the poor. This situation makes it more difficult for women who lack experience, information and time as well as transport to have access to the credit services of the formal financial system. Other forms of credit, such as saving funds, credit

funds and credit co-operatives as well as joint stock banks are few in number and poorly prepared to serve clients in need. By June 1994, 148 people credit funds, 62 credit co-operatives and 27 joint stock banks had been developed in the rural areas of the country. An estimated 28,000 people were involved in these credit organizations in 1994. By September 1997, the system of people savings has its sub-branches in 51 of 61 provinces/cities, which involved 497 thousands customers. However this makes up a very small percentage of the 20-million strong agricultural labour force.

The income gap can be also interpreted by the difference in daily time allocation between men and women. Women have to allocate more time to housework while men spend more time work outside the home.

5. Employment and Income of Urban Women

Urbanization and Women's Employment

Urbanization means the process of population concentration, industrialization, infrastructure upgrading and the development of social services development, among other things. The scope and pace of urbanization is low and unequally supported in Vietnam. Before 1975, as the population was flowing from everywhere into the cities to escape the war and earn a living, the urban population rate was high in the South, 31.3%, while in the North, as urban habitants moved out of cities to avoid bombing, the urban population was only 12.3%. Four years after the liberation of the South, the urban population was 19.26% for the whole country. By 1989, this rate had increased only slightly, to 20.1% and to 23.5% in 1999. However, in reality the number of urban residents must be larger because of increasing number of rural-urban migrants. Each

year there are thousands farmers migrating to cities such as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

This is despite the fact that the urban areas have been considered the center and engine of the social and economic development of the country. Under the new market-oriented mechanism, the pioneer role of the urban areas is becoming more apparent. That means that any changes taking place in urban areas will produce an effect on employment in the rural areas and the labour market of the country. Simultaneously, the features of female labour in urban areas reflect generally not only the present situation, but also the job trends under economic renovation. Therefore, it is necessary to understand and accurately assess the labour and employment situation of urban women.

There have been significant changes in the quantity and characteristics of urban employment as result of three factors as follows: First, an increase in the urban population, second, the restructuring of the state owned sector and third, the development of the non-state sector.

Increase in the urban population

Though family planning programs have been relatively successful, the population growth rate is still high in Vietnam, about 2.2% per annum. The rate of labour-force growth was stable for the whole period from 1979-1994 at about 3%. This means that every year there are about 1.5 million young labourers being added to the labour market in the country, while the employment rate in urban areas was 14% for women and 13% for men in 1989. As in the rural areas, the number of working-age women is always larger than that of men. In 1989, these numbers were 3.89 million persons and 3.45 million accordingly.

In recent years, a rapid increase in the urban population has been caused by rural-urban labour mobility. Official statistics indicate that there is no reliable data and information concerning the estimates of people who have migrated into cities and towns. However, the phenomenon of rural-urban unskilled labour mobility is extensive. These people are involved in a lot of jobs, especially cheap, unskilled and hard labour in big cities and towns. In Hanoi alone, it is estimated that each year about 30-40,000 people migrate from rural areas at non-crop time. Among them, women workers have been making a significant contribution to the transformation and restructuring of the urban labour market, as this labour force has been replacing simple and manual labour in urban areas. Migrants mainly take employment as maids, street vendors, garbage collection, and other hard jobs. In the future, the rate and scale of rural-urban labour mobility will increase faster than the rate of job creation. The official figure of unemployed in cities is 7-8% but in fact it must be higher, has estimated to be 15-25%. This may become a problem needing the concern of the government and related agencies and should be carefully considered in the process of urbanization of the country.

Restructuring the state-owned sector

Since 1955, the number of women labourers has increased very quickly and now occupies a significant portion of the state economic sector.

In 1992, female labourers working in the non-productive sphere accounted for 50% of the total labour force in the state owned sector. Female workers made up the majority of those employed in health care services and education, 62.3% and 76.2% respectively. Women teachers accounted for 80% of the staff at pre-schools and primary schools. However, in the entire state-owned

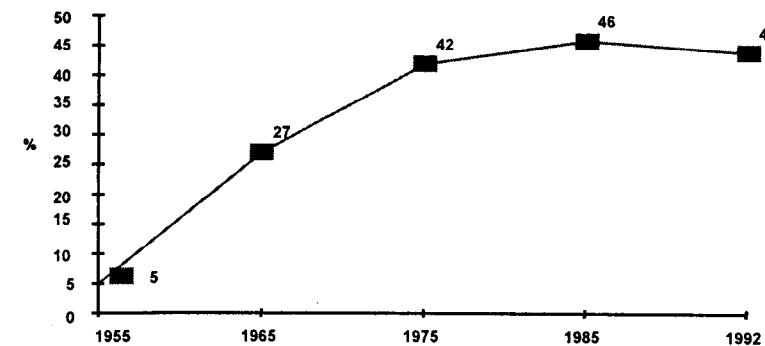
sector, women's labour never exceeded 50%, even at peak times. Women's participation levels in the state-owned economic sector varied from time to time.

The number of female workers in the state-owned sector increased very fast in the 1960s up to the mid-1970s. We all know that the then-North was concentrating all its wealth and energy on liberating the South and constructing and defending the North. Men were mobilized for the front and women, along with the task of being shoulder to shoulder with men on the front, were also mobilized to take over men's work at home in various areas. As a result, the rate of female workers in the state-owned sector grew very fast, from 15% in 1960 to 42% in 1975. However, after this time, there were major changes. The growth in the number of women workers in the state-owned sector started to decline by the end of 1970s (Figure 4.2.). This partly reveals the "supplementary position and role" in the nature of female labour; it bridges the gap when it is needed in a concrete economic context.

The decreasing trend in female labour in the state sector is clearly shown in several areas of the national economy. An examination of this trend indicates the uneven and unbalanced character of female labour division and allocation.

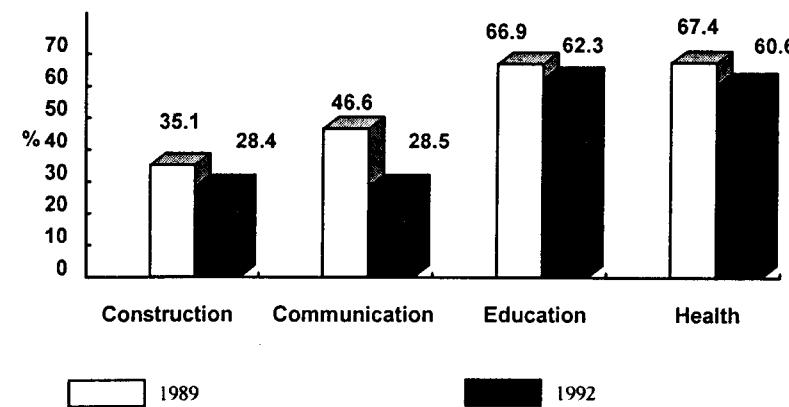
In recent years, due to the restructuring of the country's economy, many organizations and enterprises operating in social infrastructure and social services have had to cut their staff. During this process, the rate of female workers decreased significantly, from about 50% to 30% in several areas. In other areas, the percentage of female workers and employees is still high but in general it is tending to decline. (Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.2. The rate of female labour in the State sector, 1955-1992, %



Source: *The Vietnam Women's Union, Appendix of the working paper at the Fifth Conference of Women, GSO, Yearbook 1993.*

Figure 4.3. The rate of female labour in several areas in the state-owned sector



Source: GSO, *The 1989 Population census, Data on Labour, 1993.*

One of questions raised here is why more female workers than men were laid off and at a faster pace than men were. There are various explanations for this. Some argue that female labour was absorbed into the state-owned sector due to the specific conditions of the 1960s and 1970s, when little attention was paid to their professional degrees and qualifications and skills. However, if this is valid reasoning, it is necessary to realize that this would be true not only for female labourers but for male workers as well. Entering into an era of economic reform and facing increasing requirements for industrialization and modernization, the inappropriateness of the qualifications and skills of the labour force represents a very big problem, not only for female workers but for male workers as well.

Others have been using demand-supply law to explain this situation. However, what is worth noting is the recent emergence of the perception of treating labour as goods. Therefore, the current situation of labour shortage and surplus existing at the same time, paired with women's difficulties in finding jobs, can be interpreted as caused by changes taking place in the process of structural adjustment and economic transition.

There are also arguments that say that, due to their low qualifications and skill levels and poor health, women are hardly able to compete with men and, hence, they were first on the list of redundant workers at state enterprises and agencies and, therefore, were fired faster and first.

In reality, the educational attainment, technical qualifications and knowledge of women are lower than men's are. Physically and especially in terms of muscle, women are weaker than men are. However, these issues are not entirely new. Moreover, the technical qualification gap between women and men has recently been

narrowed considerably, compared to 1960s. Thus, the question is why do men have more possibilities and opportunities in finding and keeping jobs than women do?

First, the shift in the economic structure has led to the relative decline in size of the state-owned sector. The disclosure of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) has resulted in a number of workers falling into underemployment and unemployment. Managers have been facing difficulties in running their business activities as well.

Reports on the process of restructuring SOEs indicate that this sector is not in the position to provide employment to its available workers. For example, in the central SOEs (established by Decree 388/HDBT of 20/11/1991 on the regulation and formation of SOEs), the number of redundant workers who could not be placed anywhere added up to 40,000—equal to 6.5% of the total labour force in April 1993. This rate was 15% for SOEs in the Ministry of Construction and 7% for SOEs in the Ministry of Heavy Industry. In Hanoi alone, 31% of 52 businesses surveyed could not create enough jobs for their workers in 1993.

Second, the adjustment made in the economic structure appears to be unequal in its treatment of women. Women did not only make up 60% of redundant workers in the state owned sector, but also made up the majority of young people looking for jobs. Newly-recruited workers in survey areas were mainly men during the 1992-1994 period.

Third, the regulatory role of labour and employment policies have not caught up with and met the requirements of the changing realities. For example, the Labour Code was promulgated in 1994, but in 1995 its by-laws and regulations were not capable of guiding the implementation of it. As a result, a number of laws set down by

MOLISA could not be put into action. Another example is the payment scheme in the education and training sector, which has been slow in adjusting and improving, at the same time that this sector is being prioritized as the core of social and economic development strategies. As a result, the number of teachers leaving schools or spending little attention and time on their duties has sharpened the situation of teacher shortage and worsened the quality of teachers and instruction at schools.

Macro adjustments made through government policies and regulations have not fully covered issues of female labour. The need for the control and monitoring of female labour has not caught the attention of the leadership at various levels. Issues of women's labour have been left for concerned agencies and labour employers to deal with by themselves, depending on their own conditions and will. However, even in economic organizations, which are considered sustainable in the increasingly competitive environment, jobs for female workers are not available and not stable. A survey carried out on 134 female workers in September 1993 at six SOEs in Ha VND -Hanoi indicated that only 65% of respondents had regular work; the rest said that they work irregularly. Thus, from the social standpoint, 35% of female workers do not have regular jobs, which is a considerable percentage.

The 1997-1998 Asian financial crisis negatively affected many manufacturing enterprises in Vietnam. These employers had to reduce their size of production and laid off many workers including women. For example, the Garment Company had to fire nearly 10% of its labor force, of which 80% were women (Women Newspaper, July 26, 1999).

In short, the state-owned sector has seen major changes in structure, organization and management. Such changes tend to reduce the quantity of jobs and change the nature of labour. In this situation, which is intensified by the cost and profit calculations of employers and the lack of appropriate macro interventions, a portion of female workers and employees have found themselves underemployed and unemployed. Women labourers are finding it more and more difficult to find jobs in the state sector.

The development of the non-state sector

The non-state sector encompasses various types of economic units, such as households, co-operatives, private enterprises and stock limited liability companies. This non-state sector exists in two main forms: formal and informal

Most women who come from rural areas or have returned from study overseas, as well as young people joining the labour force, do not find jobs in the state sector and have been entering the non-state sector. Up to 70% of people who used to work in the state sector, which have retired or resigned early, are now working in private household economic units. The non-state sector has to employ more than 60% of people working in state agencies, institutions and enterprises as part-time, second-job workers do. Out of the total number of women of working age, 25% work as salary earners in the state-owned sector and the rest are working in non-state sector units. Thus, in the same way that most rural women are involved in farming as well as household economic activities, in urban areas they try to work in both the state-owned and non-state sectors.

The household economy includes activities dependent on the use of family labour, capital and physical premises in order to

generate income for the members of the families themselves. The household economy in urban areas has been engaged in providing services, trading, and manufactured and processed goods on a small scale. These activities may be found in the formal or informal sub-sectors, that is, registered or not registered with the responsible state authorities at different levels. In recent years, a growing number of people have been absorbed into the household economy, especially female labourers, a trend which is making an important contribution to solving the socio-economic problems arising from the transition process.

A survey undertaken in one district of Hanoi in 1993 shows that 23.8% of self-employment was based on the household economic unit and 64.4% of those employed were women.

The participants in the household economy are often retired or resigned state workers and employees under Decision 176/HDBT, those who quit jobs in SOEs, resigned military officers and soldiers, returnees from abroad and young people who have just joined the labour force. The main advantages of the household economy include its flexibility, small size, potential of creating new jobs (on average, one unit can create 4-5 jobs). The other advantages are the small investment required, the possibility for a number of people to start up new businesses, and the possibility of combining the use of family labour and the work experience of its members. However, the participation of women in the household economy has been facing a lot of difficulties that require the concern and attention of government bodies at all levels.

Household economic activities are unstable, especially among those of small scale. A large number of women are working as tailors, knitters, processors of agricultural products, manufacturers

of consumer goods and exports, etc. These activities depend heavily on the market demand and the season.

The work schedule is very dynamic in the non-state sector. At times when they have work or contracts, they have to work up to 13-14 hours a day, which greatly affects their health and eats into family time.

Female workers involved in household economic activities in general do not have experience in organization, management and running a business. It should be added that there is not yet any government agency providing training or instruction on how to run a household business.

The household economy has not gained the support and assistance of the government in investment, credit and technology. Unlike rural household economic activities, urban households have not obtained the attention and support of the government through specific policies on credit, funds, marketing, etc. In many spheres, urban household economic activities and women involved in private businesses have not been supported by related agencies at different levels and conditions have not been created for business expansion.

The formal sub-sector consists of co-operatives, private enterprises and limited-stock liability companies. These businesses have proved to have potential in addressing employment issues, especially in relation to female labour in urban areas in recent years. On average, an urban private enterprise can create 12 jobs, excluding those for family members (Vu Tuan Anh, 1995).

The non-state sector has hired former state workers and handicraft co-operative members. These groups account for 22.3% of the total workers questioned in a sample survey done at private

enterprises in Hanoi in 1993. The largest group is made up of young people joining the social labour force and the unemployed, and accounts for 68% of the women respondents in the sample survey.

However, the very potential of generating employment opportunities can also create several problems relating to labour in the non-state sector. These problems may include:

The uncertainty and lack of a legal base for labour relations. The results of a sample survey indicate that 76% of female labourers now in the private sector have not entered into any labour contract. The rest have signed short-time contracts. This fact may benefit the labour users, in that they can refuse any duty and responsibility relating to workers, for example. The uncertain and temporary nature of jobs in the private sector is the biggest challenge for workers in this sector. The legal interest of women is difficult to realize in the context of a lack of legal documents on labour relations.

The implementation of social policies on female workers in private enterprises varies from case to case. Overall, this depends on the personal perception of individual employers and lacks the control and supervisory mechanism of government and state agencies. Women in the Hanoi sample provided different answers. For example, regarding maternity policy, 53.8% of them said that they were paid from insurance funds for maternity leave; the rest were not. This 53.8% also said that they were compensated at different rates, from 40% to 100% of their monthly wage. The leave duration also ranged from one to four months. This indicates that many private managers and owners implement their maternity policy at will, not following any rule, law or regulation relating to female labour.

Studies indicate that the role of trade unions in private enterprises is very vague. In HCMC, only 30% of businesses have trade unions or organizations representing workers. In Hanoi, out of 1500 private enterprises surveyed, 250 have trade unions, accounting for 16%. Out of 200 limited liability companies, only 33 have such an organization. This is a weakness that is often abused by business owners, including foreigners who often impose rules that are disadvantageous to female workers.

Unstable jobs are another problem facing female workers in the private sector. Regardless of the many improvements recently made, 40 enterprises still do not have enough jobs for their workers for one to two months out of the year. However, what should be said is that even at times when enterprises have work, the work schedule and labour scheme are not properly organized by business owners. When an enterprise has much work, workers have to work 13-14 hours a day, and when it has little, they work 4.5 hours a day. This, again has great impact on the income level of workers' families and hence their lives.

The strong presence of women involved in the non-state sector does not mean that the market favors them. The results of interviews indicate that there are at least three reasons leading to the above situation. First, women have few opportunities to seek and hold onto good jobs in SOEs. Second, the duty of taking care of their families and children often puts women in the position of making more effort than men do. Third, as they suffer more from impact of changes on employment, they tend to accept hard, time-consuming and low wage jobs.

Therefore, it should be said that because of the economic needs and responsibilities before them and their families, women

appear to be ready to do different sorts of jobs in the non-state sector. In other words, for women who are working in this economic sector, the "push" or necessity of finding a job is stronger than the "pull" or attractiveness of the job itself.

Women develop the non-state sector not only in service and trade activities but also in manufacturing. Women owners make up 50% of labor force in industrial sector in the private, household and individual enterprises. In 1998, this sector shared 20% of the total industrial output, 70% total added values in trade. The non-state sector including agriculture contribute 60% of the country's GDP in 1999. It is important to note that women participating in the non-state sector are able to create a large number of jobs and wealth for the population.

Income

A basic and obvious feature of the actual situation of employment as discussed above is that most women are working in low income sectors and in low wage jobs. The second feature is that the income of the majority of female workers is not only below the minimum but also lower than men (Le Ngoc Hung, 1996). The third is that the wage and salary of female workers and employees is unstable.

The income levels of female workers in the productive sphere vary. Some have high and stable incomes of about 500-700,000 VND a month, such as those working in the Mechanical-Electrical Enterprise of Hanoi. However, a significant number of female workers have an income of 150-200,000 VND per month and this income is not regular. Different surveys show that up to 42.6% of female workers have an income that does not cover basic needs such as food and clothing for their families. What should also be

mentioned here is that in the present condition, in which the wages at enterprises are based on individual performance, the result is that the income of female workers is often lower than that of men. About 60% of female workers in our sample survey done in September 1993 support this statement. The main reason for this is that women have lower skill levels and, hence, are placed in lower-wage jobs. In addition, they cannot work continually as they have to take leave for illness, etc. more often than men do.

Unstable employment is coupled with a big gap in income, from a high of 500,000 VND to a low of 60,000 VND. Overall, the average wage of female workers in the private sector is lower than their counterparts in SOEs. According to our study, it is 144,000 against 164,000 VND a month.

Low and unstable income cause women to work overtime or seek second jobs. Up to 86% of female workers surveyed said they had to work more than one job at a time.

Female workers in the education and health care sectors have such low income levels that it is a serious and pressing concern. Though they are sometimes paid additional allowances, their income level is still much lower than their counterparts with similar qualifications and skill levels in other economic areas and men in the same jobs. The average wage and salary of female workers and employees in education and training counts for 79% of the average level of the whole sector. In HCMC in 1992-93, the income of pre-school teachers accounted for one-half or even one-fifth of female workers in other areas, such as private business. This is one of reasons why an increasing number of primary school teachers have been quitting their jobs in recent years. In the academic year 1991-1992 2,122 teachers of primary schools quit their jobs, in 1992-1993 this number reached 2382 teachers. All of them were women.

From this evidence, it can be seen that the employment and income of female workers is closely related to the changes and macro adjustments taking place in the economic structure. The task of raising income and creating more job opportunities for women workers cannot be separated from solutions to issues of labour structure, occupation and the role of state-owned sector in the market economy. A question raised here is how to restructure the economy without creating disorder and inequality in the income, employment and livelihood of already-employed people, especially women.

6. Renovating the Economics and Research Methodologies Applied to the Economic Activities of Women

Women's studies of economics can make a contribution to solving the problem of how economic reforms can create more favorable conditions to improve the position of women and move toward gender equality. This approach to the issue, on the one hand, provides a solid ground for improving the social status of women at present, and, on the other hand, requires women's studies to be more flexible and sensitive in discovering and addressing research issues emerging from real life. Obviously, the significant achievements of the economic reforms have provided good conditions and a foundation for inheriting and developing positive elements that can successfully target the goal of "rich people-powerful nation" and a civilized society. With this point of view in mind, without reporting on the achievements and successes, a researcher will not be able to any develop any specific insights other than a reconfirmation of the positive face of the economic reforms. Therefore, what we have discussed in chapter III is not aimed at discovering or emphasizing the results and naturally positive

impacts of the economic renewal in the country in recent years in terms of the employment and income of female workers and employees.

The evidence, data and arguments presented in this chapter mainly tell us about the "not OK" aspects emerging in the period of economic transition, or, in other words, the shortcomings that need to be overcome. This does not neglect the achievements of reform, on the contrary, it highlights the profound significance of the positive aspects of the overall reforms that have been taking place nation-wide in Vietnam recently. More precisely, as a revolutionary theorist once said, "pointing out the right problem" and "raising the correct question" is only half the battle. A problem emerges only when the physical and material conditions for solving it are ripe.

Women's studies of economics will surely not limit itself to making efforts to emphasize the great political and economic significance of women's participation in economic activities and the characteristics of 52% of the total labour force. The talk of researchers will not limit itself to stressing the role of social labour in liberating women. The Marxist study of women should focus on analyzing and discovering processes and mechanisms that may help to improve social justice and eliminate the emerging male-female inequality in social and economic activities. Issues that have been raised include the need to understand the reasons for the problem of male-female polarization in trades, occupations, employment and income. It is necessary to seek answers to the question of why women are clustered in low wage jobs, have low skill levels, and use much older technology and techniques in comparison with men. Women's studies of economics need to emphasize the very significant role of women in the development of a multi-sector economy. The statistics cited indicate that women are not only

involved in economic activities to earn an income for themselves and their families, but they also create jobs for others in both the state-owned and non-state sectors, in rural areas and urban areas. This stresses the role of renewal policies in liberating the social labour force, and, at the same time, highlights that the potential creativity and dynamism of female labour in the new system needs to be taken into account and developed.

CHAPTER 5

HEALTH, EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL LEVELS

1. Working Conditions, Environment and Health of Women

The health of women is very important for society, not only because women make up a significant portion of the labour force, but also because their good health provides an important precondition for maintaining and developing the labour power for the whole economy. The possible consequences of neglecting the health of women at present including losses in productivity and efficiency, and future generations may also have to pay the price in terms of physical development and sustainable economic development for the whole country. Therefore, health care is not only in the interest of every individual woman, nor is it only their responsibility; it is also the duty of the entire society.

Women's health includes many factors, ranging from the quality of health care and level of nutrition in the family to

conditions at the work place and in the living environment. The section below will focus on describing two issues, working conditions and living environment, which can be directly affected by employers and government policies.

Working Conditions

While it is true that as the economy is shifting to a market system, more job opportunities are being created, women do not have many opportunities to choose working conditions appropriate for their health conditions.

On the one hand, due to insufficient funds, coupled with a lack of responsibility and a primary focus on making profits, enterprises are not concerned with improving working conditions. On the other hand, female workers, because of their high demand for earnings due to their poor economic situation, have to accept poor working conditions, which badly affect their health.

The state of workers' health depends greatly on working conditions and the characteristics of work and rest regimes, but the most important factors are the temperature, humidity, noise and degree of danger and tension present in the work environment. Observations and measured indicators of working conditions show that a large number of female workers are now working in conditions of poor hygiene and safety. The results of studies, for example, indicate that up to 51.2 % of female workers in the railway sector are working in environments characterized by toxicity, dirtiness and heat at higher than acceptable levels; 74 % in light industry are working in conditions harmful to their health (Dang Lan, 1995).

To get a better picture of the working conditions and environment of female workers, let's take a closer look at specific economic sectors and groups of workers.

Women farmers. It must be mentioned that female farmers are working under alarming conditions at present. They are often exposed to unhygienic, harmful and toxic conditions such as dirty water, manure, pesticides, etc., and the majority of them do not use safety gear, such as boots, protective clothing, gloves, etc. According to a survey on female farmers done in Dai Mo Commune in the Tu Liem District of Hanoi in 1993, 100 % of them have never used safety gloves while working in the fields.

According to the results of surveys in Phu Hoan Commune, Hoa Vang District, Quang Nam-Dang Nang Province and in Khanh Hoa Commune, Tan An, Long An, 9.5 and 15.7 % respectively of female farmers pump pesticides to protect crops (The Center for Woman and Family Studies, 1994). Due to lack of knowledge and means of protection, using pesticides has been negatively affecting the health and reproductive functions of women there. According to a report from the Bac Thai Hygiene and Plague Prevention Station, the percentage of people pumping pesticides who have suffered serious health consequences is very high, reaching 70-75% in 1992. How has this been allowed to happen?

There are reasons stemming from both the policy side and from among the working people as well. The use of chemicals and toxic pesticides in farming in Vietnam has become quite common. According to classifications made by WHO, 23% of pesticides in use in the fields in Vietnam during the 1993 Summer-Autumn crops belong to the harmful-toxic class, 19 % toxic, and 52 % - very toxic. The quantity of pesticide used tends to increase every year as demands on agriculture development increase, while the

government and related agencies have only been paying attention to these issues in industrial sectors, neglecting labor protection in the agricultural sector.

There has been almost no supervision or monitoring of the application of pesticides and chemicals in order to eliminate their negative effects on the health of working people. In addition, in the last ten years, especially since the enforcement of Resolution 10, labour "watchdog" activities formerly undertaken by agricultural co-operatives have gone into a slump and have been left to the farmers to implement themselves. Because of the combined factors of lack of information, limited knowledge, and the especially difficult economic situations of farmers, farmers concerns with labour safety have been limited or non-existent.

What is also worth noting is that **ethnic women** have been working in even poorer conditions. Ethnic people in the mountains have to use simple and obsolete working tools. Female farmers in mountainous areas often do not have any information about improved working tools or worker safety equipment. As a result, the time and energy spent on a similar unit of work tend to be many time higher compared with the Delta, for example, for H'Mong female farmers growing rice on steep hills. Most female farmers in the mountains have to walk 2-3 kilometers to the field and many of them have to spend the night in the fields at harvest.

Women in the non-state sectors. Although they are in better conditions than female farmers, have also been suffering due to poor working conditions. In non-state sectors there has been some polarization; working conditions in private businesses are poorer than in co-operatives. The result of a survey on 120 craftspeople at 30 businesses in Hanoi in 1993 shows that 50% of female workers

were labouring in conditions harmful to their health (Table 5.1 and Figure 5.1).

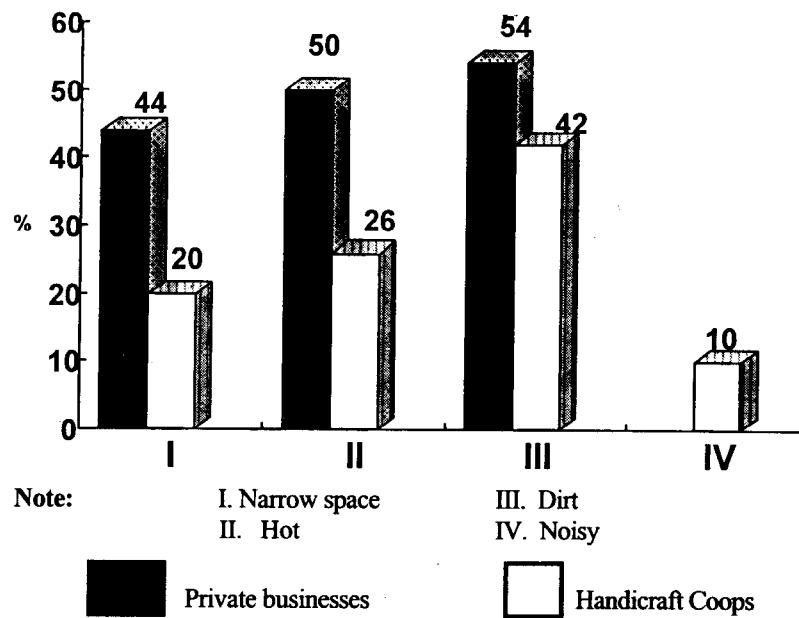
Table 5.1. Evaluation of working conditions of female labourers in co-operatives and businesses, %

	Narrow space	Hot	Dirt	Noisy
Private businesses	44	50	54	-
Handicraft Coops	20	26	42	10

Many female workers at Dong Da Chemical Limited Company used their bare hands when working with chemicals and cream soup. Most workers do not use gauze masks, hats and security clothing. The results of the survey indicate that only 10.7% of enterprises are taking measures to reduce the noise level, such as using rubber earplugs, cotton, coca-nuts, etc. About 80% of enterprises provide workers with gauze masks, but only 46% provide equipment to protect against toxic chemicals, 10.7% have applied measures to reduce mental tension, (such as allowing exercise and breaks), and 25% provide security clothing.

A 1998 survey on small- and -medium size businesses found that 80% of the total surveyed enterprises did not meet health standards of working conditions, 70% - used outdated equipment and machines and 70% of women working within harmful conditions including dirt, hot, toxic air. For example, workers in some companies have to work in environments with dirt exceeding 312 times the standard (Dang Lan, 1998).

Figure 5.1. Evaluation of working conditions of female workers of co-operatives and businesses, %



Enterprises, which are not applying work security measures, argue that they have included these costs in unit rates and wages. This reveals employers' partial poor understanding of labor security issues. However, some female workers support this idea because they are concerned more with income. In addition, the reasons listed by female workers for not wanting to use protective equipment include poor quality and inappropriate size and style. It is clear that producers and suppliers of labor protection equipment have not been adequately concerned about the color, style and taste of the users.

Ensuring work safety and a hygienic environment for workers in **foreign joint ventures** has also become a problem in recent

years. These ventures have been growing fast thanks to open economic policies and Vietnam's Foreign Investment Law. Now, after more than 7 years of these policies, more than 1300 projects have been attracted to Vietnam with a total worth of US\$15 billion, creating 165 thousand jobs (Dang Lan, 1995).

Joint ventures and foreign invested businesses may have more advantages than local ones in terms of equipment, technology and techniques, working style and payment, but in fact, these positive aspects have not created many benefits and have instead made negative impacts on the health of workers. First of all, due to the lack of appropriate controls and supervision, most machines and equipment in use are outdated, producing environmental pollution in Vietnam. Inspections done on three production lines and 717 pieces of equipment imported by 42 businesses show that 50% of the equipment and 73% of the machines are outdated, made in 1950-1960s, and 70% of the machines run off depreciation time of machine use. Some machines have even been imported which date from the start of the last century. The importation of equipment that is 30-40 years of out date is not only a negative aspect of technology transfer and investment, but also creates the potential for harming the operators.

Second, in applying techniques and using equipment, joint ventures have not been paying adequate attention to dealing with waste pollution in the working environment. None of 14 joint ventures surveyed in Hanoi and HCMC maintain a hygienic working environment for workers. Moreover, toxic air, dirt and wastewater have been polluting the surrounding environment.

Third, the working intensity and long work hours in joint ventures create factors that directly affect and depress workers. A study done by the Center for Women and Family Studies (CWFS)

of HCMC revealed that more than 42% of female workers in joint ventures have to work more than eight hours per day; among them, 18.5% have to work more than 60 hours a week (Ngoc Dan, 1995). Working at a rate of about US\$50 per month under such unsecured and unhygienic working conditions, many workers worry greatly about the state of their health and the future. The reality indicates that up to 44.3% of 410 workers asked revealed that they had to go to work when they were sick in order to keep the job and maintain income for the family; only 7.5% of sick workers went to see the doctor. Of note is the fact that female workers make of the largest percentage of sick workers (Ngoc Dan, 1995).

Unequal treatment maintained in joint ventures has worsened the social and psychological atmosphere in such workplaces. Several managers and workshop heads are foreigners who make use of legal gaps and holes in Vietnam's labour code to cut off wages, fire and treat workers rudely at will. As a result, the number of workers' disputes, conflicts and strikes is on the upswing (Duong Thuy My, 1995).

Women in the State-owned Enterprises (SOEs) have not yet received appropriate concern and little attention has been paid to improving their working conditions. At many places, the positive efforts of labor protection work done in the past have not been continued. This is why the majority of female workers still have to work in harmful environments.

An analysis of data obtained leads to the conclusion that harmful and toxic factors such as noise, dirt and heat are the most significant, resulting in women's over-fatigue after quitting time. In addition, there are many other factors negatively affecting the health of female workers, including the intensity, high frequency of activity at work, mental tension and monotony of the work, as well

inappropriate work regimes. Of course, with the first group of factors eliminated or improved by equipping the work place with worker safety guidelines, the latter one would also be eliminated by improving labour organization and technology and renovating equipment.

Equipping workers with safety gear is still a problem at present. The number of female workers fully equipped makes up 36.1% of respondents in the Hanoi survey. Significantly, 24.6% of female workers questioned do not have any equipment at all and the rest (39.3%) have safety equipment but in poor condition.

Analysis by sector indicates that among the SOEs surveyed, employees in heavy industry are the most consistent in ensuring labour safety. Those in light industry are the worst, with only 7.5% of workers among respondents saying that they have all necessary safety gear, while 12.5% say they have nothing. At some SOEs in the textile industry, female workers do not have hats, gauze masks or any means of protecting themselves from the noise made by old machines and equipment.

Like business in the non-state sector, managers of state companies explain that they translate the expenditures of safety gear into wages, forcing workers to buy the equipment. In fact, few female workers buy devices, but use this money to bridge the family budget gap.

Entrusting security to workers clearly is not a desired solution. This method is not effective at all in improving working conditions and protecting the health of workers, especially in the context of low income and lack of supervision by employers. The duty of employers to distribute information and educate workers in safety and hygiene at work should be intensified, as well their duty

to maintain proper control and supervision to enforce adherence to labor safety and hygiene rules and regulations.

2. Living Environments

In men's eyes, women are more sensitive to living conditions, including water, air, eating convenience and living environment. Clean water is especially important for women and children. The lack of clean water in Vietnam is a very severe problem in both urban and rural areas. At present, more than 50% of urban and 30 % of the rural population have insufficient water meeting health standards for use. According to 1990 statistics from the Ministry of Health, only 37.8% of Vietnam's total population had access to clean water. Only 20.4% of 2748 households in the Mekong Delta had water taps and wells (Nguyen Kien Phuoc, 1995). According to the latest estimate, in urban areas 50% households have enough clean water for everyday life and in rural areas 36% of families have access to clean water. The shortage of clean water is the reason for transmitted diseases such as eye diseases and others.

The lack of clean water leads to many diseases of the digestive system, eye and skin, as well as gynaecological diseases. Untreated manure, waste and garbage are major factors in polluting the environment and water source. The percentage of households having latrines is also still rather low. According to statistics, in 1990 only 45.5% of households in the country had standard septic tanks; these figures were 28% in the Mekong Delta and 30.9% in Tay Nguyen province. One hundred percent of households surveyed at one place in Lang Son province did not have bathing areas or latrines.

Even in Hanoi, according to a 1992 Ministry of Health survey, only 46.3% of households have hygienic latrines. Regardless of

efforts made by the Hanoi Urban Environment Company, 57% of garbage still is not carried outside the city, but dumped in city ponds and canals.

Untreated manure, urine and dead animals are also hosts for disease and germs. In the Mekong delta, 40 land samples surveyed were found to be seriously contaminated, 10 % slightly contaminated, and only 4% were considered clean (Several Biological issues relating to Women in Vietnam, 1991).

Using untreated manure to fertilize rice and crops in the northern delta and to raise fish in the southern delta is a very widespread practice. The disposal of manure and urine is still very primitive in many places where minorities are living. Many households have not separated animal sheds and coops from living areas.

Due to deforestation, the living conditions of highland people and the ecological environment of the entire country are becoming seriously impacted. The total area of forest was 13.5 million hectares in 1943; now, only 7 million hectares remain. The percentage of hills with foliation is rather low. The degree of coverage in Son La, for example, is only 10% (Nguyen Khoi, 1995).

The destruction of the environment as a result of the improper use of fertilizer and pesticides and unregulated forest exploitation is nearly always due to the self-interest of individuals and short-term benefits. Thousands of people, for example, came to the wetlands of Minh Hai province to cut down mangrove trees and raise shrimp without proper training in both raising shrimp and protecting the forest; as a result, they failed in both activities (Nguyen Lan Dung, 1995).

Cramped, damp, living spaces, especially in urban areas, also seriously affect the health of children and women. The results of a survey carried out by the Institute of Sociology in 1992 show that most people in Hanoi (94.1%) had an average living space of 2-6 square meters per person. The data obtained from a survey on women engaged in handicraft production revealed that the average living space of their families was about 4-6 square meters per person.

Urbanization and industrialization, at present, have brought about some positive changes: improved infrastructure, widened and improved roads, more electricity and water. However, as these efforts have been made inconsistently, instead of improving the living conditions of people, the pollution in inhabited areas has become a serious problem, particularly in industrial cities like Viet Tri, Hai Phong, Hanoi and HCMC.

There have been studies to assess the impact of the living environment on the health of people, but it is completely impossible to estimate the serious consequences of it. Viet Tri City in Vinh Phu province, for example, is now seen as the most polluted city in Vietnam, due to the presence of wastewater and garbage from nearby manufacturing and chemical factories. Statistics from Vinh Phu Disease Prevention Center reveal that the percentage of people in Viet Tri with ear, throat and nasal diseases is 49-58%; about 46% have eye diseases, 42% tooth, jaw, gum diseases, and 10% skin diseases. Smoke from Lam Hao Superphosphate Factory and wastewater from Bai Bang Paper Mill is affecting the entire population of Xuan Huy commune. As a result, 22% of the population in this commune have skin infections. About 5 % have

tooth, jaw and gum infection, 46% are mentally depressed and 74% of women of working age have had gynaecological diseases (Nguyen Thao, 1995). The rate of infections among factory workers can be much higher.

In short, pollution in Vietnam's living environment affects the health of everybody, but women and children most of all. Vietnamese and agencies that seek environmental solutions have only recently recognized this situation.

3. Health Conditions of Female Workers

The living environment and working conditions directly influence the health of working people. Therefore, it should be said that the anticipated consequences of poor working conditions as described above include work-related diseases and a worsened state of health for a large portion of female workers.

The results of several studies on working conditions, living environment and the health of female workers clearly highlight this situation (Nguyen Thao, 1995). For example, 85.64% of female workers in light industry have a health status of second grade and lower; 25.96% are suffering from lung diseases caused by cotton dust and 10.8% due to silicon; 15.12% have "grey skin" disease; 80% of female workers in the railway industry have back pain, and 60% suffer from pain due to overwork.

A classification of 200 female workers in rural and urban areas by health, done by the Center for Women and Family Studies in 1992, shows that less than 20% of these female workers are in good health (Table 5.2).

Table 5.2. Health classification of women by group, %

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4
Peasants*	2.8	53.8	28.2	15.2
Factory workers **	28.6	51.3	18.9	1.2

Source: * Survey done in Phu Tuc, Phu Xuyen, Ha Tay, 1992

** Dang Lan, 1995.

Among educated women, 17.4% enjoy good health, while only 32.6% are in a poor state of health. The results of surveys done on women, in general, show that there is a close relation between ill health, working conditions and the living environment. On average, for example, a rural woman is suffering from 2.5 diseases (Vu Tuan Anh, 1995). It has been proven already that dirty water and poor hygienic conditions increases the likelihood of contracting gynaecological diseases, and that dirt and smoke lead to a higher rate of lung disease. The table below illustrates this clearly (Table 5.3).

Table 5.3. The rate of infection of diseases common to women, %

	Gyneco-logical	Ear, nose, throat	Lung	Skin
University Teachers	5.0	51.5	-	-
School teachers	61.5	88.6	-	-
Farmers	66.7	27.7	25	34
Forestry workers	21.2	25.9	33.3	-

Source: Survey done at the University of Hanoi and in Minh Dan commune, Ham Yen, Tuyen Quang province, by the Center for Women and Family Studies, 1992-1993.

The situation of woman's health, in the short-term, may reduce women's working hours and performance. In addition, this

situation can seriously affect their entire lives and have long-term consequences for future generations.

A report from the Central Medical Appraisal Commission on disabled state workers in 1989-1990 shows that after only 24 years of working, 42.3% of women do not have energy to continue their jobs. Of those, who have 20-25 tenure years, 35.2% are not able to work as before. For those with 15-19 years of tenure, 19.7% can not continue their jobs (Pham Duc Thuy, 1995).

According to this data, many female workers become unable to work at earlier than expected and their working ability decreases quickly over time. Women who go to work at factories at 18-20 years of age, for example, find that after 24 years, i.e. at age of 42-44, they cannot work any longer and must retire 11-13 years early. At many forestry enterprises and construction sites, female workers at 36-40 years of age have to resign due to poor health (The Central Trade Union of Vietnam, 1995).

A survey of 100 thousand workers in the non-state enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City by the Labor Protection Sub-Institute indicates that 50% of the respondents suffered occupational diseases. Analysis of 1,900 workers health record books shows the dramatic and serious reduction in their health status. For example, 48-56% of women lost weight, more than 40% suffered diseases related to the nose and 45-55% with disorders in menstruation (Women Newspaper, May 7, 1997).

Poor living conditions and hard work, insufficient food and unhygienic conditions may all badly affect the health of mothers and children. Data released by the health departments of provinces and cities shows that a large percentage of pregnant women suffer from shortage of blood and give rise later to malnourished children. In the entire country, 77% of pregnant women are suffering from

this situation. This is the main reason why 41% of children are malnourished and underweight. The rate of slow mental development in children under 15 is 0.4 to 2 %, as a result of diseases of the brain in infants and diseases suffered by women during pregnancy (Duong Thi Cuong, 1995).

Renovating health care services, the introduction of health care insurance and the fee for service system, as well as the expansion of the network of pharmacies and drugs, have provided more choices for the user. However, this situation has also created many urgent problems that must be resolved. Many ill women do not have access to services as they can not afford them. The phenomenon of low price-poor quality and better paid- better served in health services and the provision of services is also a social problem.

4. Education and Qualifications

Education

In the traditions and culture of Vietnam, education and educational degrees are highly valued. The Constitution of Vietnam long ago provided for male-female equality in access to education and training. National policies and social institutions have always tried to create equal opportunities for both men and women to obtain educational degrees. The result of these efforts are clearly indicated by data from the 1989 population census. According to the results of the census, for example, the literacy rate from age 10 and up was 90%, of which the rate for the female sub-group was 84% and for men, 93%. The number of people who had gone or were going to school was relatively high, about 94%. In comparison to other countries having the same income level, these percentages mark great achievements in education.

However, along with the process of economic change taking place in the country, signs of danger are emerging in regard to education, especially in relation to gender. This has brought to a head issues about the inferior and undeveloped conditions in the education of women. For example, the number of people going to school is going down, while the number of those dropping out is going up, and the disparity between the attainment of educational degrees by men and women is increasing.

The education level of women is lower than that of men. In the country from rural to urban illiteracy of women is higher than that of men (Table 5.4).

Table 5.4. Literacy situation of the population aged 10 and above by gender and regions, 1999, %

	Literate	Illiterate
National	91,16	8,84
Female	88,2	11,8
Male	94,31	5,69
Urban	95,19	4,81
Female	93,41	6,59
Male	97,09	2,91
Rural	89,85	10,15
Female	86,5	13,50
Male	93,41	6,59

Source: Calculated from the 1999 Population Census.

The educational attainment of women, in general, is lower than that of men. In the 10 and above age group, the rate of women who have never gone to school is 16.6%, twice that of men at 7.5%. Due to the burden and duty of family and children, women have fewer

chances to go for higher educational degrees. As a result, the rate of women obtaining tertiary and higher educational degrees is half that of men, 1.1% of women compared to 2.1% of men. (Table 5.5).

Second, the gap in the educational attainment between men and women and between urban and rural areas is relatively large. Both rural males and females have had considerably less access to education. The rates of rural men and women who have gone to school or have not finished primary school are higher than those in urban areas, and the rate of the rural population having a tertiary education and higher is only one-third of the rate for the urban population.

Table 5.5. School Attainment by the population aged 10 and above by gender in urban and rural areas, 1989, %

Educational degrees	National		Urban		Rural	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Never in school	16.6	7.5	9.0	3.3	18.8	9.1
No finishing primary school	52.8	52.7	48.0	44.6	54.4	57.0
Primary education	21.4	26.8	22.4	27.5	21.0	25.8
Secondary education	5.2	8.3	11.8	14.1	3.3	5.2
Professional school	2.9	2.5	6.2	4.5	0.9	2.0
College and University	1.1	2.1	3.1	5.6	0.5	1.0

Source: General Statistics Office, Analysis of the result of a sample survey, Hanoi, 1991, p.55.

The rate of boys and girls never attending school is higher in rural areas than in urban areas. The rate of college/university degree holders in rural areas is one third of those in urban areas.

The regional differences in the rate of school attainment are clearly seen in secondary schools (Table 5.6).

Table 5.6. The rate of school enrolment by girls by regions 1999, %

School	Urban	Rural	All
Primary - I	47,2	47,2	47,2
Low secondary-II	46,7	43,3	45,9
High secondary-III	49,5	43,5	45,7
All	47,5	46,4	46,6

Source: Calculated from the 1999 Population Census.

Rural women have rather fewer opportunities to obtain secondary education than their counterparts in urban areas, while the rates of women having primary education in both areas are relatively similar, 22.4 and 21 %; however, the rate of rural women having a secondary education level is 3.3 %, compared to 11.8% for women in urban areas.

The development of the household economy in rural areas leads to many girls having to drop out early to help the family work in the fields to earn income. Especially in those families, which have a large number of children and lack labour power and have a low income, girls usually have to drop out earlier than boys. In the period from 1988 to 1991, the number of girls in secondary school decreased by 42 % and the number of girls attending upper-secondary school went from 47 % in 1990-1991 to 43 % in the 1992-1993 school year. In 1999, there are more girls than boys quitting high secondary school (52.3% girls verse 40.1% boys) (Table 5.7).

Table 5.7. The education situation of boys and girls at secondary school age, by regions, 1999, %

Education status	Low secondary school age		Higher secondary school age	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
Going to school	79,24	85,10	42,76	55,94
Drop-out	16,65	11,61	52,28	40,12
Never in school	4,11	3,29	4,96	3,94
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Calculated from the 1999 Population Census.

The high rate of dropouts means women are spending fewer years going to school. The average number of years spent in school for the entire nation is 5.4 years, 4.9 for women and 5.9 for men. Educational attainment also varies in terms of region and gender (Table 5.8.).

Table 5.8. The number of years spent in school, by gender and region, %

	Northern mountain mid-land	Red River Delta	Old Region 4	Central Coastal	High land	East-southern	Cuu long Delta	All
Male	5.8	7.2	6.4	5.8	3.7	6.1	4.7	5.9
Female	5.0	6.1	5.4	4.6	2.9	5.2	3.8	4.9
Total	5.4	6.6	5.9	5.1	3.3	6.6	3.3	5.4

Source: GSO, Survey on Living level of population, Hanoi, 1992-993, p 59.

The situation in which fewer women than men are going to school starts at an early age. The rates of girls age 10-14 not going to school is higher than that of boys (Table 5.9).

Table 5.9. Rates of girls and boys not going to school by age, %

	5 to 9	10 to 14
Boys	36.1	20.2
Girls	35.6	26.2

Source: *Thai Dao, Ministry of Education and training, working paper from the conference on the progress of women from 1985-1995, Hanoi, 3/1995, p. 4.*

The illiterate population is concentrated mainly in the mountainous and minority areas, making up 38 % of the total of 8 million illiterate people in the entire country. For most minority groups, except for the Hoa, the rates of people illiterate in the Vietnamese language are still high and vary among ethnic groups. For example, the illiteracy rates for the Homing, Lahu, and Colao are more than 90 %, for the Bana 72 %, 61.7% for the Xedang, and 52% for the Ede. Most minority women, such as the Homing and Bana, are illiterate.

During the last few years, the level of literacy and the standard of culture in Vietnam have been much improved. In 1992, the percentage of people who had not finished primary school was 49.9 %, 31.3% finished, primary school, 8% finished secondary school, 2.5% finished professional education, and 1% finished college and university. The data obtained from a survey on the living situation of the population for 1992-93 indicates that the rate of women 10 years of age and below who do not know how to read and write was 15 %, compared to 7 % for males.

Improving literacy and cultural standards as well as raising the quality of education and training, therefore, has become the number one national policy. However, the implementation of this

national policy has been facing some socio-economic problems. The most important challenge is the large size of the population, the predominance of young people, and its fast growth. The 28 million children below 14 years of age are overloading the present educational and training system. The educational and training sector itself is facing problems of how to improve education and training quantity and quality.

The most important problems in recent years are the high rate of drop-out schoolchildren and the persistent shortage of teachers, as well as the poor qualifications of teachers.

According to information culled from a survey on the living standards of the population, the drop out rate in the 6-14 age group was only 8.9 %; however, in reality, this rate is much higher and tends to increase at all levels (Table 5.10). What should be noted is that girls make up 64% of drop-out children.

Table 5.10. Drop out rates of schoolchildren by level, 1985-86 and 1991-92, %

	Primary I	Low secondary II	High secondary III
1985-86	10.3	11.4	9.6
1991-92	13.4	32.0	14.5
1994-95	6.9	7.4	5.9

Source: *Report by Kim Dung of the Institute of Educational Science, printed in Nhan Dan Newspaper, No. 12/2/1993.*

The teacher shortage is also worsening. During the 1991-92 school year, the country faced a shortage of 42,000 teachers for both primary and lower-secondary school, and by 1993-94 this number had gone up to 60,000. (Table 5.11).

Table 5.11. Shortage of teachers for the 1991-92 and 1993-94 school years (persons)

School Year	Teachers in shortage of level I	Teachers in shortage of level II	Total
1991-92	40,000	2,000	42,000
1993-94	55,710	4,290	60,000

Source: *Report by Dinh Gia Phong of the Ministry of Education and Training, printed in Nhan Dan Newspaper, No. 5/9/1991, and an article by Nguyen Ngoc Chu in Education and Time, No. 11, 11/1994.*

The number of teachers quitting their jobs has been increasing, causing the shortage of teachers to reach almost 10 percent. In HCMC for the 1991-92 school year, 2,122 teachers of primary schools quit, and this number reached 2,382 for the 1992-93 school year, constituting 20 % of the total number of working teachers. The teacher shortage crisis has become especially serious in several mountainous and remote provinces, such as Cao Bang, Dac Lac, Kien Giang, and Minh Hai.

Regarding the quality and qualifications of teachers, according to an assessment made at the conference on after one year of implementing Politburo Decision 04 regarding educational work, up to 60% of teachers did not meet the standard qualifications for teaching. The minimum standards set for primary and pre-school teachers is graduation from teacher training school, for lower-secondary teachers, graduation from a pedagogical college, and for upper-secondary teachers, graduation from a pedagogical university. However, at the pre-school level, 92% of teachers did not have that qualification; for primary schools this number was

52% and for vocational training schools 67 % (Nguyen Ngoc Chu, 1994).

The national army of teachers in 1997-1998 consisted of 742,734 people, of which 76% were women. Over the past ten years, the number of female teachers has increased at all levels from pre-school to University. However, women teachers concentrate in pre-school, primary and lower secondary school (Table 5.12). There are many difficulties in terms of physical and instrumental conditions of teaching. The teachers' income is very low. Teachers of primary school earn twice less than teachers of secondary schools (World Bank, 1996).

Table 5.12. The rate of female teachers, 1989-1998 (%)

School	1989	1993	1997-1998
Pre-school	100	100	100
Primary	73,96	77,96	77,41
Low secondary	66,98	67,5	68,59
High secondary	45,92	49,32	50,83
Technical school	34,8	44,7	44,65
Vocational school	20,3	25,5	25,7
College, University	31,2	32,5	36,2

Source: Ministry of Education and Training. CEDAW report. 1999

This situation indicates that along with efforts to improve the levels of illiteracy and cultural standards for all people, improving women's access to education marks a first priority and deserves long-term concern and investment. In the context of seeking employment, women with lower and poorer educational levels suffer more compared to men. They may then become more absorbed in hard, simple work that demands lower professional qualifications. Therefore, improving the position and the role of

women in social and economic development can only be accomplished if education becomes a real national policy in which educational and training for women makes up one of the most important parts.

Professional and skill levels

The formation of the labour market and the commercialization of labour have revealed weaknesses in Vietnam's labour force, especially in terms of insufficient professional qualifications and skills, most notably for the female workforce. This situation is creating great challenges to the industrialization and modernization of the country.

Among those 15 years of age and above, uneducated and technically unskilled women account for 93.3 %, while the rate for men is only 88.1%. Only 0.9% of women technicians have some kind of degree, while the rate for men is 3.7%. The number of women who attained college degrees and higher accounts for 1.3 %, while men account for 2.5 % (Table 5.13).

Table 5.13. The distribution of the population aged 15 years and above, by professional level and gender, 1989, %

Degrees	Female	Male	All
Unskilled	93.3	88.1	90.9
Technicians with degrees	0.9	3.7	2.2
Technicians without degrees	1.2	2.6	1.8
Professional degrees	3.3	3.1	3.2
College and University degrees	1.3	2.5	1.9

Source: Le Thi, "The issues of job creation, income augmentation, and improving the position and status of women at present time in Vietnam," Hanoi, 1991.

The 1999 distribution of the population aged above 13 year by qualification shows that 94% of females do not have any technical training, compared to 90.8% of males (Table 5.14).

Table 5.14. Qualification of males and females, 1999, (%)

Qualification	Female	Male	All
No technical skills	93,92	90,75	92,40
Technical qualification	1,17	3,46	2,27
Vocational training	2,87	2,72	2,80
College, University	1,94	2,92	2,40
Post-graduate	0,02	0,08	0,05
Total	100	100	100

Source: Calculated from the 1999 Population Census

The qualification structure of the labor force by gender shows that the human development achieved significant results. The rate of skilled workers increase for both male and female labor force. The number of women who hold college or University degrees increases four times from 5.9% in 1989 to 24.5% in 1999 (Table 5.15).

Table 5.15. Gender structure by qualification, 1989-1999, (%)

Qualification	1989		1999	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
No technical skills	56,6	43,4	52,8	47,2
Technical training	21,8	78,1	26,8	73,2
Vocational training	56,2	43,8	53,3	46,7
College/University	37,5	62,5	41,7	58,3
Post-graduate	5,9	94,1	24,5	75,5

Source: Calculated from The 1989 and 1999 Population Census

As the population aged 15 years and above is classified by professional qualifications ranking from lowest to highest, the rates for women decrease disproportional. For example, out of 1.2 million people who have professionally degrees and have finished professional and vocational training schools, women account for 55.7%, while men account for 44.3%, but out of 526 people who have doctorate degrees, women make up only 5%, while men make up 95% (Table 5.16).

Table 5.16. Population aged 16 years and above, by qualification and educational degree and gender

Qualification	Total number	Female	Male
1. Post-graduate Education			
- Doctorate	526	5	95
- Candidates for doctorate	7986	12.3	97.7
- Professors	589	3.9	96.1
- Associate professors	2801	4.6	95.4
2. Tertiary education *	678,100	36.4	63.6
3. Professional, vocational	1,190,100	55.7	44.3
4. Technicians	978,500	20.8	79.2

* 1989 data

Source: National Commission for the Progress of Women, data on Vietnamese women for 1985-1994, Hanoi, 1995.

Poor qualifications and low skill levels for women labourers are serious obstacles to the improvement of women's role and position in the economic and social spheres. This is also an obstacle to the upgrading of the social infrastructure and the further application of new technological advances in the national economy.

Reforms in the administrative sector, for example, have been confronted by major difficulties in the quality of labour: only 25 % of the total number of public servants and employees can now meet the requirements of the economic reforms; 75% of administrative staff and employees need more training and retraining (Tran Xuan Kien, 1995).

A similar situation can be found in all areas of the national economy. In rural areas, most skilled labourers were trained informally, either through traditional methods, such as being taught by a father or older relative, or they have learned simply by doing.

Only 0.8 % of rural labourers have some university education, while 4.75% were trained at vocational and professional schools. In the state sector, the rate of skilled labourers, both men and women, was 3-4%, lower than the 6-7% in the private sector. In addition, with the increasing requirements by businesses for skilled and qualified labour, about 80% of the population of working age do not have any skills (Nguyen Huu Dat, 1995).

Among people who are looking for jobs and registered with the Hanoi Job Promotion Center, 77% have not had any training and only 52 % have had some secondary education (Mai Trang, 1995).

The content and quality of training skills, on the one hand, are slow in improving and are unable to meet the needs of the ongoing diversification and specialization of the economy. On the other hand, although the manual labour-based economy is undergoing transition, it has not resulted in a large number of high-skilled jobs requiring intensive knowledge or technical expertise. As a result, there is now a surplus of educated people in Vietnam. The number

of people who have finished universities and colleges and are seeking employment has increased recently. However, it is estimated that up to 14,000 graduates from 55 universities and colleges all over the country do not have jobs (Kieu Minh and Thuy Duong, 1995). This rate increased from 13.4% in 1988 to 35.4% in 1992 in Hanoi (Tran Hong Luu, 1995).

Educated women who could make up a pioneer force in the scientific and technological fields for the industrialization and modernization of the country have also lately been suffering from shortage in numbers and from being left behind in the rush to acquire qualifications, skills and knowledge. A survey done at Hanoi National in 1993 indicated that 33% of educated women had tertiary and higher educational degrees, but about 40 % of this number were age 50 and older (Ngo Thi Thuan, 1993).

Ten years from now, the number of educated women who have retired will account for 72 % of total retired people. Among candidates for doctorates, this rate will be 85.7 %, while young women are still few in number and lacking sufficient concern and opportunities to move forward in their career. For example, the foreign language proficiency of young cadres is a major concern. Though a foreign language provides an important means of obtaining information and improving the knowledge of female teachers, especially young ones, this skill is still limited. For example, only 29% of educated women under age 30 can speak one foreign language; 0.7 % of them know two foreign languages (Table 5.17). The rate of women scientists and technicians who know foreign languages is also very low. In 1989, this rate was 38.3%, of which women in sciences accounted for 36.8%; in social sciences 49 %; in culture and arts 33.3 % (Vu Hung, 1995).

Table 5.17. The rate of women using foreign languages by age and by the number of foreign languages they know, %

Age	One language	Two languages
Under 30	2.9	0.7
31 - 40	15.2	1.4
41-50	4.6	1.9
51- 60	4.3	2.9

Professional and skills training

Professional and skills training for women cadres is an urgent requirement; however, there have been difficulties in these areas in recent years. There are many reasons for this situation that need examination. However, the section below focuses on only two major issues that are closely related to very important factor for the success of training and retraining activities. They are the concern and commitment of leaders, managers and women employers and, second, the need for training and retraining women workers and employees themselves.

The concern and commitment of leaders and employers to training and retraining women employees

Professional and skills training and retraining depends much on the training and retraining policies of an institution or organization and the extent of the managers and employers' concern for this matter. Therefore, this matter is becoming more important for women workers and employees nowadays.

Research done on this topic already indicates a vast distinction between the state and non-state sectors. Managers and employers have paid very little attention to this matter. According to the result of several surveys undertaken at various enterprises, 71.4% of enterprises in state sector regularly pay attention to

training skills, while this rate was only 17% for the non-state sector (Table 5.18).

Table 5.18. The degrees of managers and employers' concern for training and retraining women workers and employees, %

	Regular	Sometimes	Never
In state sector	71.4	23.6	5.0
In non-state sector	17	48	35

Source: *Results of a survey undertaken on enterprises in 1993 in Hanoi.*

State agencies and institutions often pay attention to systematic training and retraining as well as improving professional skills for their employees and workers. However, this work has been a bit slow in relation to the requirements in recent years. The shift to a self-accounting system has led to a growing concern with more and higher quality training and retraining activities. However, it is impossible to overlook the question of the quantity and scale of training and retraining activities, as present training and retraining activities cover just 10% of the total demand.

Along with standard employment issues, improving the skills of women workers and employees has its specific difficulties that not all agencies and institutions have fully realized. For example, some organizations provide transport and fares, money for training materials, allowances, etc., to encourage workers and employees to attend training and retraining courses. In comparison with men, however, the number of women workers and employees sent to training and retraining programs at all levels and in all organizations and institutions is 30-60 % lower. It is clear that training and retraining women workers and employees in many cases has not

been seen as a specific matter, and there is a lack of appropriate planning to meet the specific needs of employers.

The non-state sector appears to have advantages in making choices and recruiting employees workers suitable to the particular work or career. However, private enterprises, so far, have focused on exploiting whatever skills workers and employees already had, rather than investing in training and retraining. As a result, women workers and employees have to make investments in training and retraining themselves. This strategy of so-called "gaining from what's ready" (hot vang) may be beneficial in the short run, but in the long run, to survive and develop in an increasing competitive context, it is necessary for the non-state sector to have more appropriate investment strategies for labour power development, particularly as women workers and employees make up the largest portion in this sector.

Training needs of women labor

Professional and skills training issues are not only related to the increasing needs and desires of women workers and employees for knowledge. Also important is women's needs can be recognized and met. The data obtained from a survey done in 1993 on the training of 860 women workers and employees in the energy sector indicates very specific and concrete issues of training and retraining women workers and employees.

When asked about their desire to have more training and retraining, 65% of women workers and employees said they wanted it. They did not only consist of educated women but were also from among the group of women who have already had basic and higher training. This indicates a great need for training and retraining in the future, because these two groups make up a big share of women laborers in all social and economic sectors.

Most women who revealed the desire for more training and retraining belong to a group of women of medium and upper-medium income levels, who make 83.8% of the total surveyed. More importantly, 17.2% of women who wanted more training and retraining were in poor economic conditions. This fact indicates their strong commitment and hope for having more opportunities to earn a higher income, which can be the result of obtaining higher professional qualifications and skills.

Living conditions and income levels may have a certain effect on whether women want to go for more education, training and retraining, but they may not be the only determinants. To understand this relation more clearly, let's take a look at the rest group of women, that makes up 35% of the total respondents. There are four main reasons that are often mentioned by these workers and employees for not seeking more training: they don't see training and retraining as necessary; they think they are too old to get more training and retraining; or because of the pressures of family and income. These are big issues, because female farmers and women workers and employees in non-state sectors for not wanting to have more education, training and retraining also mention these reasons. Let's have a look at these reasons one by one.

The most important reason that has been cited by this group is that they did not find more training and retraining and better skills to be necessary. Why? It is clear that the professional qualifications and skills of women workers and employees are too low to meet the requirements of the industrialization and modernization of the country. How this can be interpreted?

One of reliable answers is that training and retraining have not really benefited those who have got it. This is true. Can they get promotions, wage increases or new and better job

opportunities after having more training and retraining and acquiring better skills? Is having more training and retraining and a higher skill level the real requirement for a woman to be recruited and hired or promoted? Let's examine the answers of women who attended training courses who were asked whether they got a wage rate increase after getting more training and retraining. Only 32.3% of the total number of respondents said "yes"; 58.1% said "they got the same" and 9.6% said "their wage declined". Thus, 70 % of them did not see any real benefit from acquiring better qualifications and skills.

Though wage rates and salary are not always dependent on improved skills and knowledge, in the context of difficult economic and living conditions, a consideration of the real and clear benefits of additional training is necessary. Therefore, the question raised here is not only how to improve the quality of professional training, but also how to increase the technical level of work and production activities. This question has been urgent not only in industries but also in the agricultural sector. For example, the liberation of labour in the agricultural sector has not led to an increase in the pace of its mechanization. For four years, from 1989-1993, the number of buffaloes and cows owned by households increased from 5 million heads to 6.4 million and the number of simple working tools used in farming increased from 80 million to 90 million pieces. The rate of mechanization in ploughing and preparing land decreased from 22.6% of the total area under cultivation, equal to 1.8 million ha in 1987, and went down 21% in 1990, equal to 1.6 million ha. In mountainous areas, these rates decreased from 29% to 0.6%, in mid-land areas they went from 7-9 % to 2.1%. In the Red River Delta, these rates were 34.9% and 21%; in the central coastal areas they were 14.7 and 7.2%; and in areas in the South they declined

gradually from 24-25% to 22%. In the Mekong Delta the rate increased to 35% (Nguyen Dien, 1993).

In the manufacturing sector, the rate of mechanization reached 50%, while the rate of technological renovation was 8-10% (Nghiem Quy Hao, 1995). These low rates and levels of technical and technological advances would hardly encourage workers and employees to improve their skills and knowledge. It should be seen that with the mechanization level as low as it is at this time, strategies of strengthening the industrialization and modernization of the country and improving the technological, technical and scientific capabilities should create a demand for the improvement of women's professional qualifications and skills.

The second reason cited for not needing more training is the age issue. It should be noted that, except for long-time training courses, such as part-time advanced courses, most other forms of training and retraining activities do not set age limits or criteria for applicants. Therefore, the age issue here is mainly psychological. Closely linked with the perception of their age, women feel and see themselves as physically weak and, hence, they may not be willing to engage in training and retraining programs. That is one reason why some women at around 40 feel they are too old to have further education or training and retraining. In addition, there is another reality: the retirement age for women workers and employees (at 55 years old) is set 5 years lower than for men (at 60 years old). Thus, in comparison with men, the age limit set for having further training and retraining and education is at least 5 years lower than for men. So, if the time for having children is counted (if bearing and raising two children takes about 6-10 years) the training and retraining opportunities for women would be much more limited.

The third reason listed is the family situation. This is a common reason that might be derived from the lack of support from their husbands and the burden of taking care of and raising children, especially at the age when babies need maternal care and breast feeding. Family constraints may be the hardest task before the parents and may come before other urgent work in the household. The complexity and variety of family situations always make it difficult for women to make choices and decisions regarding training and retraining. The reality indicates that a not insignificant number of women refused to engage in training activities as they have to stay at home to help their husbands, children and relatives in studying, or simply because they can not find other ways to finish the housework.

The fourth reason cited for lack of interest in training is that joining training courses directly affects their family income levels. This is a very real fact and the most important issue for low income groups of women (i.e. less than 100,000 VND per month in 1992-1993). The regulation regarding full-time employment and the allowances available for women trainees for the time they attend training courses is very significant. Most women of these groups have additional part-time or second jobs for raising income levels. The time they spend on training may result in a decline in the income of their families and, hence, may create a family budget deficit.

For these reasons many women do not want to participate in training courses and do not feel the need to have more qualifications. A survey of training needs of female workers in state and non-state enterprises shows that 73.6% of 905 respondents do not participate in training courses. The major reasons for this are related to policies of training incentives and women's lack of time and income (Table 5.19).

Table 5.19. Reasons for not participating in training and wishes for better training opportunities, %

Reasons for not participating	Rate	Wishes for training opportunities	Rate
Not enough time	56.9	Stable Income	79.3
Low income	29.7	Short training course	68.1
Economic problems	27.1	Promotion after training	52.6
Job doesn't need training	19.6	Moving to better job	29.9
Health problems	5.9	Moving to better machine	11.2
Need time to make money	5.8	Other wishes	2.3

Source: Bui Thi Thanh Ha. "Training needs of female workers" *Journal of Science of Women*. No. 4. 1998. p. 23-32.

However, 73.6% of the respondents said that they are willing to attend training courses if their companies require them to do so. Only 16.7% said they will consider it while believe that if their company let them participate a training course they will be provided with necessary conditions. All respondents expressed their wishes of being promoted after training.

The problems of women workers and employees show the reality that training opportunities for women are fewer than for men. Even in the presence of regulations and policies ensuring gender justice or some special treatment for women, there are other important factors in their lives, which prevent many women from realizing their desires for education and training.

To overcome or reduce these difficulties for women, the state and government should understand these issues. There should be a close co-ordination of social organizations such as trade unions, women workers and families. To motivate and encourage women to study and seek training, along with general policies, it is necessary

to create better conditions and design different forms of education, training and retraining activities.

Nowadays, training and retraining for women can be undertaken in different forms, including official and unofficial courses organized by government or non-government agencies or training associations; state and non-state financed; short- and long-term; in urban centers or remote areas.

In the context of new economic mechanisms, unofficial and remote training and retraining programs are tending to increase. These forms of training and retraining may be the determinants of improving professional qualifications and skills for women workers and employees, especially for female farmers and young women. For example, when it was discovered that 80% of young women registered with Job Promotion Centers did not have any skills, the Hanoi Job Promotion Center began organizing a variety of vocational training courses for these young people. Training courses on garment making have attracted 46.2% of registered young people; of these 80% were women. The rates for training courses on cooking were 23.5%; hotel and restaurant management 18.6%, and mechanics, electronics, motorbike repair 11.7% (Mai Trang, 1995). Regarding this matter, therefore, the concern and attention of social organizations and associations of the state as well as the society as a whole must be reflected in detailed policies and measures on all the related issues.

In short, although positive results have been achieved in improving the qualifications and skills of women workers and employees, this area is still facing a lot of difficulties and challenges in the market economy. Most important is to make concerned agencies understand the matter and realize the situation, especially that of women laborers. The improvement of the position and situation of women, by radical implementation of national

education and training policies, would then be easily attained as human resources are improved in the creation of sustainable development in the country.

To conclude this chapter, we would like to quote Ho Chi Minh's saying "For a hundred years of benefits, invest in manpower development." What we are implying here is that health care and education and training for women in the long run will benefit everyone.

Educators, social researchers and policy-makers surely know the implication of the statement "looking at children, one can foresee the future of a nation", but very few know that looking at the health care situation, professional qualifications and skills as well as education levels of women can aid in understanding the future and past of a nation. This is why all of Chapter Four has emphasized the profound content of the strategic and essential statement we cited above.

For every individual, health care, education and skills are not only the means for earning a living but also a external objective, because health provides happiness and "knowledge is power" in both the physical and spiritual sense. However, it is true that someone will be concerned about his or her health only when they feel there is "something wrong" inside. It is also still true that education and further study, in many cases, must be postponed or arranged after the need to survive.

To minimize this paradox that may happen at macro-level, social and economic development strategy designers should master and radically apply a more comprehensive and generalized position and perception of health care, education degrees and professional skills for women. This position has been presented in chapter 4 in the following aspects.

First, health care, education and skills for women, in particular, have a very deep and profound economic significance and long-time social impact. The issue is not in how to exploit the human resources for the future. To deal with the correlation between the short- and long-term and between economic and social benefits represents a major challenge before those making specific policies on health care, education and skills improvement for women. In this respect, it is necessary to identify and fully understand possible negative impacts, influences and costs that may be paid in the future by the health of the coming generations, so appropriate measures should be taken to protect health and improve the knowledge and educational attainment of women in accordance with the present situation.

Second, a society must be just and civilized in the process of construction and development by continually creating conditions for better health care, education, and training for women and people in general. This means building up and upgrading social infrastructure for the sustainable economic development from the beginning and, at the same time, taking into full account human factors as the first important resources for the development.

Finally, by using current, objective information and data to discuss the situation, Chapter Four has tried to analyze the problems needing immediate solutions in the process of economic reform. Important achievements obtained in education, health care and training and retraining, along with a fuller understanding of the significance of these problems for women, without ignoring present difficulties, can provide a solid and profound foundation for solving problems in the working conditions and living environment as well as the opportunities for female laborers to have more education, training and retraining.

CHAPTER 6

WOMEN MANAGE THE SOCIETY AND ECONOMY

1. Women in the Management of Society

Women's participation in leading and managing has been recognized as a lively reflection of their ability to master their society. It is also seen as a measurement of the society's recognition and evaluation of women's position, role and abilities.

The history of Vietnam is full of many examples of great women who led troops and led the country in the construction of the nation. A long-standing tradition of the Vietnamese is respect for women. The problem of treating women unequally by overestimating men and neglecting women, which stems from feudal ideology, has been criticized, fought against and eradicated. The active and effective participation of women in management has a positive impact on their position.

In fact, Vietnamese women have actively participated in leadership and management in all areas of social life. A government report about the election of People's Committees at all levels in 1994 shows this clearly. In thirty cities and provinces, accounting for 55% of the total provinces and cities of the country, the percentage of women elected to People's Committees was about 20%. In some areas, the rate of elected women was relatively high, for example 35% in Ha Giang and 34% in Tuyen Quang provinces. Women have been involved not only in state management, but also in economic leadership. At present, many state and non-state enterprises operate effectively, thanks to their excellent directors and managers (Le Huyen Thong, 1995).

At work, women cadres not only develop and express high managerial abilities and qualifications, but also demonstrate their responsibility and commitment. Among cases in which cadres, managers and party members have been punished by party organizations and taken to court, the rate of women has been very low, around 2.4 to 3 per cent.

However, in comparison with the requirements of the country's reforms, in particular, the important role of the female labour force in the economy and the size and extent of women's participation in leadership and management still can be improved. This is reflected, first of all, in the decline in the rate of female cadres in the last few years. The number of female cadres among people elected by organizations at all levels has decreased by different rates depending on rank.

In the National Assembly, a supreme authority elected by the people, the rate of female members decreased from 32.3% in Session V (1971-1976) to 17.7% in Session VIII (1987-1992). In the National Assembly of Session IX (1992-1997), the rate of

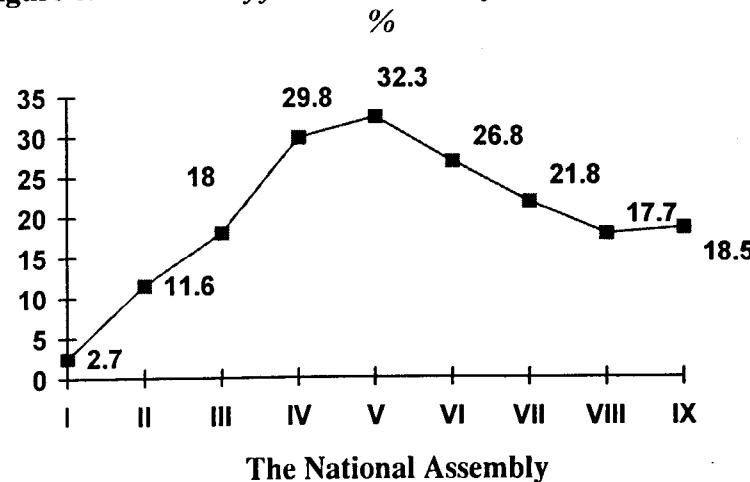
female members was 18.5% and increased to 26.2% in 1997-2002. This means that the current rate of female members of the Assembly has increased in comparison to Session VIII, but it is still lower than that in 1971-1976 (Table 6.1)

Table 6.1. The rate of female members at the National Assembly, Sessions V-IX, 1971-2002

	Sessions	Total number of members	Female	
			Number	Percent
V	1971-1976	424	137	32.3
VI	1976-1981	492	132	26.8
VII	1981-1987	496	108	21.8
VIII	1987-1992	496	88	17.7
IX	1992-1997	395	73	18.5
X	1997-2002	450	118	26.2

Source: *The National Assembly*.

Changes in the degree of women's participation in the supreme legislative authority, the National Assembly, reflect three clearly defined stages. The first stage runs from the foundation of the DRV up to 1975, with the number of female members increasing faster and reaching 32.3% of the total members of Session V (1971-1976). The second stage runs from Session VI (1976-1981) to Session VIII (1987-1992), with the steady decrease of women's participation. The number of female members in Session VIII made up just 64% of Session V (Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1. The rate of female members of the total, Sessions I-IX,

Source: *The National Assembly*, 1993.

The voice and the quality of every female member, in fact, depend on the qualifications and abilities of each of them. It can be seen that they have already made significant progress in their education and professional degrees. The rate of female members has tertiary and higher degrees was 10.6% for Session VI and 58.9% for Session IX (Table 6.2).

Table 6.2. The rate of National Assembly female delegates with University degrees, 1976-1997

Sections	Total number in the National Assembly	Numbers	Rates (%)
VI (1976-1981)	132	14	10.6
VII (1981-1987)	108	12	11.1
VIII (1987-1992)	88	43	48.9
IX (1992-1997)	73	43	58.9

Source: *National Assembly Office*, 1993.

However, the tendency toward a decline in the rate of female members gives cause for serious concern at the lower levels. A comparison of two sessions, 1985-1989 and 1989-1993 reveals that women's participation in the People's Councils at various levels decreased from 28.6% to 12.2%. At the provincial and municipal levels, this rate decreased from 19.4% to 12.3% at the district and town level, and from 19.7% to 13.2% at the commune and neighborhood levels respectively (Tran Thi Que, 1995).

The results of the election of the People's Councils for the 1994-95 term (October 1994) shows that the rate of women elected at the provincial and district levels increased significantly, but the rate at the grassroots level was very low, 14.1% (Table 6.3).

Table 6.3. The rate of women elected to People's Councils, 1985-1989

Level	1985-1989	1989-1994	1994-1999*
City, province	28.6	12.2	20.4
District	19.4	12.3	18.0
Commune, sub-district	19.7	13.2	14.1

Sources: Data from the Government Office, 1993.

* For only 42 cities, provinces. Report of women's work of Ministry of Light Industry, Hanoi, 1994.

The decreasing trend in the number of women participating in management and leadership has been noticed not only in elected organizations but also in professional agencies. The number of female managers for the period of 1991-1993 has decreased considerably compared to the 1980s. This trend has become common in many institutions and organizations, including sectors and industries employing mainly women, such as light industries. The rate of women occupying chief positions in light industry at

present is only 6% - 8% of the total, deputies about 10 %, while the rate was 16% in the past.

The second thing to note is the inadequate numbers of women participating as leaders and managers compared to the number of women working in different state agencies and organizations in the social and economic spheres. For example, in 1992 women occupied 7-9% of the total leading positions at the ministry level and about 13% at the department level, while women accounted for 51% of the social labour force.

In some areas, such as the higher education sector, the rate of women is relatively high but the rate of female managers is very low. Women rectors and women vice-rectors of universities account for only 4.4%, chairs and vice-chairs of departments 8.3%, women managers at subdivisions 13.7%, and at the functional unit level 13.3% (Ngo Thi Ngoc Anh, 1995). In the light industry sector, women workers account for 70% of the total workforce while women managers account for about 10% of the total managerial positions.

What deserves attention is that female leaders occupy few top positions; they assume deputy positions in most cases--that is, supplementary positions assisting the chief, who is usually a man. For example, women occupy 4.3% of deputy positions, while they occupy only 2.7% of director's positions.

The third feature that must be noted is that there is a gap and inconsistency within the team of women leaders. This relates to the placement, qualifications and age of female cadres. Female cadres, especially at the rank of ministers and vice-ministers, are mainly located in sectors relating to issues of children, women, and social and mass work. There are no female cadres holding important positions as vice-ministers or ministers in significant economic

sectors such as agriculture, rural development, industry, planning and investment, etc.

Female cadres and managers at the central level enjoy higher rates of participation and, at the same time, have higher levels of qualifications than those at grassroots levels. For example, among 9,635 women chairing Women's Unions branches at the commune and neighbourhood levels, only 2% have a tertiary or higher education and only 17.7% finished secondary school. More importantly, 448 persons, accounting for 4.6% are illiterate (Ngo Thi Ngoc Anh, 1995).

The gap is also in terms of age structure. Most female cadres and managers are middle aged; most of them are around 50 years old, while very few young women are available as candidates.

In short, the paradoxical conditions of the existing female cadres and leaders have been clearly recognized, especially since the start of the overall reforms in the country. This requires the increased participation of women, but this force is being left behind, as they are unable to meet the requirements of the changing environment.

The reasons are various. First, when facing the new requirements, some female cadres appear to be incapable, satisfied with what they have and not able to adapt to changes taking place in the reforms. However, the main reason needing examination relates to inconsistent leadership policy and the severe and unfair treatment and perception of women in general and management cadres in particular.

Some of the female cadre policies of the past were inclined toward mobilization and propagandizing to motivate women's contribution. Other policies promoted and placed female cadres according to organizational structure, neglecting educational and

professional qualifications, training and retraining, and paying less attention to specific standards and criteria. These policies resulted in a situation where some female cadres were promoted even though they were not in the position to assume new positions successfully. However, the inconsistency in cadre policies was sometimes labelled a women's issue and became an excuse for neglecting the training and re-training of female cadres as well as a reason for setting before them other challenges and trials before considering their promotion in many organizations and agencies.

Along with this, and the lack of timely evaluation and assessment of the implementation and adjustments of state policies in this area, the sector promoting female cadres has not made use of its profound possibilities.

Upon entering the renovation period, many regulations and rules on the training, education and promotion of managers and leaders no longer appeared adequate, but they have not been amended accordingly. Other policies have been slow to be implemented and some have not yet been received enough legal support to be introduced into everyday life.

The tendency to overlook women and undervalue the abilities of female cadres is still a habit of quite a few male leaders and party members. On the other hand, a severe assessment and judgement on women's ability and work performance, coupled with overbearing demands on women in the workplace as well as in the family, have significantly limited the opportunities for female cadres to develop themselves.

2. Women Manage Social Organizations

With leadership and management roles women make a great contribution to democracy at localities and mobilization of broad

participation by individuals, households, organizations and communities. The most important of these organizations are Vietnam Motherland Front, Vietnam Women Unions, Vietnam Labor Federations, Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth, Vietnam Farmer Association and many other organizations and agencies. The rate of women leaders in social organizations is 1.5 times higher than that in authority agencies and economic enterprises. Table 6.4 presented detailed information of number and rate of women leaders in social organizations at central and provincial levels.

Table 6.4. The number and rate of women leaders in social organization at central and provincial levels

Positions	Central		Province/City	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
President	1	20.0	86	31
Vice-president	8	44.4	151	28.2
Presidency member	16	41.0	-	-
Secretary	15	24.2	584	46.9
Executives	179	26.6	1960	45.4

Source: Nguyen Phuong Thao. "Women and political activities" *Journal of Science of Women*. No. 3/1999. P. 6-12

Women leaders in social organization show their advantages in working with people, strongly fighting against evil social phenomena such as corruption, drug addiction and protecting the collective benefits in the name of social justice and gender equality.

Women managers are active and dynamic to lead their subordinates and colleagues in adopting the Party's guideline and the Government policies. They know how to involve the mass's participation in production and improving the living standard at localities. The activities of Vietnam Women Union have brought about practical benefits for its members, especially in hunger elimination and poverty reduction, in forming new way of life and cultural living environments, and in population and family planning.

However, as in other sphere, women managers in social organizations face a lot of difficulties, problems and challenges. On one hand, traditional norms and customs placing great importance on men's role and ignoring their social roles of women are not favorable for women leadership. On the other hand, occupied leading status, women are assigned to complete a lot of responsibilities and duties but they do not have enough facilities to do their tasks. At the same time, Vietnamese women are considered to be "domestic general" who need to take care of all their family members including husband, children and their grand-parents in terms of emotional and economic lives. Many competent and professional women have to refuse the leader position because their relatives, friends and colleagues, who consider the place, do not properly support them and roles of women are at their home. In this situation, women managers do their best to successfully complete their tasks while spending much more time and energy than men do.

Therefore, the success of social justice and gender equality programs depends greatly on how to create better and favorable understanding and supportive conditions for women managers to play their roles in social and community organizations.

3. Women and Entrepreneurship

Women entrepreneurs in non-state sector

The phenomenon of women becoming involved in business has been attracting the attention of many businessmen, policy makers and researchers. The reasons for this are varied.

First of all, since the launching of new economic policies, women have begun to start up businesses and expanding their activities. An increasingly large group of women entrepreneurs is becoming visible nowadays. They include self-employed innovators, female business owners and managers, and those who are very actively participating in business management as directors and deputy-directors.

The non-state sector involves 87% of the total female labor. The rate of women in this sector is also higher than that of men, and they make up 67% of the self-employed. In 1994, there were 56,000 households engaged in business in the non-state sector in the form of small and petty industries and handicrafts, a million households in trading, retail-sales, and services, and 73,000 households in transport services.

The information obtained from a survey carried out in one neighborhood in Dong Da district, Hanoi, in July 1995 reveals that out of 397 business units in the neighborhood, 222 women were owners, accounting for 55.9%. Most of these units were family or business enterprises employing about 20 labourers.

The 1997 Rural occupation survey indicated that most rural enterprises have been established after adopting Doi Moi in 1986. For example, 60-80% of occupational households have been

operating since 1989. More than 70% of rural enterprises have started since 1989, of which 50% were established since 1993.

Women owners of businesses in all kinds of industries accounted for 10-30% of the total. However, most businesswomen concentrate in traditional occupational and semi-occupational household businesses and registered trade and service companies (including private, co-operative and state-owned enterprises) (Table 6.5).

Table 6.5. The rate of women owners by businesses and occupation

Occupations	Mixed occupation household	Specialized occupation household	Registered enterprise
Processing	10.01	17.08	14.20
Industry, construction	12.27	14.81	9.84
Service	20.92	30.30	18.06
All	15.74	22.14	13.96

Source: *Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. Rural Occupations in Vietnam – 1997. Hanoi 1998. P. 46-48.*

A 1998 survey done by the Center of Small-and Medium Size Business Assistance found that in Hanoi City 21.26% of total business owners are women and in Ho Chi Minh City – 25.54%. However, 50% of owners of household businesses are women.

As they are flexible and sensitive to market changes, women entrepreneurs are often concentrated in services and manufacturing consumer goods that large enterprises do not make. For example, women make up a relatively high percentage in garment making, food and sales. In 1989, women made up about 70% of the total

number of tailors in Vietnam. Statistics from 1989 show that women made up 70.8% of the total engaged in trading. This rate was 78.8% in private trading (The CWFS, 1991).

As in other countries, Vietnamese women entrepreneurs are rarely involved in industrial goods manufacturing. In rural areas, they make handicrafts, process agricultural products and engage in petty trade. In urban areas, they are mostly in services and retail sales. This tendency reflects clearly the shift in economic structure. It is obvious that women are quick, sensitive and active in responding to government policies giving priority to the development of agricultural production, consumer goods and exports. As a result, the quality and quantity of goods have greatly improved recently.

However, one important and unique fact about Vietnam is that women's participation in the informal credit sector is very extensive. Lending units and groups in both rural and urban areas have been created and are being run by women. In this case, women are very active in mobilizing idle money for business purposes.

Women entrepreneurs not only help to increase wealth, create jobs and generate income for the society, but, in the end, they also improve their own status.

Vietnamese society has been shifting from a centrally planned and subsidized mechanism to a market system operating via government regulations oriented toward socialism. This process, in fact, marks a radical shift from a low level of development to a high one. A highly developed, civilized and just society requires male-female equality. The fact that women presently are very active in business activities indicates that they are trying hard to actualize themselves first of all in economic areas. The creation of self-employment and income generation should reduce their economic

dependence on men. This would shake the root of discrimination against women and topple the practice of overvaluing men in the society and in the family, which is based on discriminatory perceptions that still exist in the minds of some people.

It is also important to study the management style of women, and initial studies are beginning to paint a portrait of the woman entrepreneur.

Most urban women entrepreneurs are those who used to work in the state sector. This is especially true for the small-scale and household units. As the structure and mobility of the labour force is adjusted, there will be more and more women staff-workers and employees going into business. A survey done by the Market Management Department of Hanoi (October 1987, October 1989 and January 1990) indicates that only 30% of business households had been doing business for a long time; more than 60% had been or are currently run by state workers and employees (Hoang Chi Bao, 1992).

Women entrepreneurs, in general, are not young people: 40% of them are 31-49 years of age and 56% are above 40 years old. Most of them were working somewhere else before starting businesses. What is interesting is that they are highly educated people in comparison to the average level of women: 18.4% of women entrepreneurs questioned had a tertiary or higher education; 30.6% were trained at professional training colleges; 18% finished secondary school. These figures vary slightly according to the type of business and from area to area (The CWFS, 1993).

Although the reasons for starting a business may vary, what is interesting is that after running and operating a business for some time, more than 80% of women entrepreneurs questioned said that they were satisfied with what they had been doing. And 90% of

them said the economic situation of their families was better than before. Some of them even felt regret at not having started a business earlier, having bypassed a lot of opportunities and wasting much time to get rich (The CWFS, 1993).

Women have many advantages in starting and running businesses; however, they also face a lot of difficulties. Getting credit is one example. As they have developed a habit of being more concerned with clients and consumers, they have easier access to credit than men do. However, they face more difficulties in starting up businesses, especially in mobilizing the initial capital and fulfilling the necessary procedures.

The fact that business activities are becoming more widespread in the country and the image and example of the successful business owner is becoming common to people has created a positive impression that supports women entrepreneurs. Regardless of the various problems, many women have been making strong efforts to overcome difficulties in the family to be able to contribute more and more to the sustainable development of the society and social justice.

It is clear that this is not a new thing. However, the fact that women have been quick in mastering and becoming successful in economic activities and management is very significant in the context of the dynamic economic development in our country.

The business management capabilities of women, their business performance and the issues of running a business may be interesting research topics in the coming years.

Women Managers in the State Economic Sector

Unlike the non-state sector that has only been promoted and developed in recent years, the state sector has a long history

beginning with the foundation of DRV. Since then, women have been shoulder to shoulder with men in almost all areas of operating and monitoring the economy of the nation. Therefore, it would be careless to talk about women and business without mentioning the work of the team of SOE directors and managers and the chairwomen of collectives (co-operatives).

The characteristics, nature and scope of business management decisions may be very different in state-sector enterprises and co-operatives than in private ones. However, within the many skill requirements of management work, such as organizational ability, decisiveness, and responsibility, similarities can be found among managers working in these two sectors. In the 1960s, one could meet women full of enthusiasm, ready to give their own for the nation and their communities at work sites, factories, and co-operatives, in the style of women under socialist regimes.

Women of the north during wartime had to assume a lot of responsibilities as directors, managers of SOEs, and chairwomen of co-operatives. By the end of 1960s, there were 3,733 women chairwomen and vice-chairwomen of co-operatives, 45,000 female heads of production teams out of more than 20,000 agricultural co-operatives existing at that time. There were thousands of women working as deputies, directors, department heads and division heads at SOEs, companies, and department stores (Le Thi Nham Tuyet, 1975).

In general, women managers have proven to be decisive but reasonable and flexible at work. They are capable of motivating and attracting their colleagues and subordinates and responsible and economical in using and developing the assets of the state and collectives. The shift to the new economic mechanism in the late 1980s has put huge challenges before women managers. First,

business managers have had to move to a self-accounting system, adapt to changing market practices, compete for better product quality, ensure the sale of products and finally, make a profit. A series of demands for knowledge and new skills have risen before managers. The market mechanism uses common standards to assess the qualifications and talent of managers without favouring women or discriminating against or treating women differently in both the state and non-state sectors.

The primary distinction between the function of entrepreneurs and managers has become narrower. In the past, directors of SOEs (including chairmen of co-operatives) had to fulfil the function of managers but nowadays they have to exercise responsibility as investors and almost as entrepreneurs as well. They are responsible for maintaining and developing the state assets and funds assigned to them as well as raising additional funds for their business activities to ensure profits. Before, the directors of SOEs were more or less passive, awaiting support and assistance from above, and they only had to fulfil the production directives sent forth by the government. Today, like all other entrepreneurs and managers, they have to be sensitive to and adapt to market changes, as well as master and quickly filter information so that they can make quick, appropriate decisions. Many women directors, deputy-directors, managers and heads of organizations and agencies have been successfully undertaking these functions and duties.

Many women managers appear to have the potential for turning loss-making and marginal enterprises into profitable ones, ensuring job creation and higher incomes, thereby improving living conditions for workers. Many women managers pay much attention to improving technologies, developing new and expanding markets by supplying high quality goods and services, and developing the

reputation of their enterprises. These excellent women managers can be met in enterprises or companies such as Dong Nam Beer Factory, Hai Ha Candy Company, Sea Shipping Company of the South, Book Publishing Company in HCMC and Thuong Dinh Shoe Company.

However, the team of directors in SOEs have been revealing their weaknesses and limitations in both quantity and quality, especially in the context of the new requirements raised by the restructuring of this economic sector.

According to some statistics, in the early 1980s, women managers of enterprises occupied about 5% of the total number of leadership positions (Table 6.6).

Table 6.6. The rate of women managers among the total number of enterprise managers, 1981, %

Positions	Numbers	Rates (%)
Central enterprise directors	21	2.6
Central enterprise deputy-directors	66	4.8
Local enterprise directors	16	1.8
Local enterprise deputy-directors	57	4.4

Source: *Report at Vietnam's 5th women conference, 1982, p 78.*

Data provided by 12 ministries and agencies.

In the early 1990s, high-ranking women managers and state and government officials such as ministers and vice-ministers accounted for 10% of the total positions at these levels, and were mainly in social areas such as education, health care, etc. There

were often few or no women leaders in important sectors of the economy such as planning, investment, finance and banking. The rate of women general directors and deputy general directors of companies is still low, less than 5% (Table 6.7)

Table 6.7. The number and rate of women managers, 1992

The likes		Vice-minister		Department director		General director, director		Deputy - general -director, director	
L	%	SL	%	SL	%	SL	%	SL	%
4	9,5	11	7,0	30	13,3	17	2,7	148	4,3

Source: *The Documentation of Vietnam 7th women conference, by the National Committee for the Progress of Vietnamese Women, Statistics of Women in Vietnam, 1985-1994, Hanoi, 1995.*

Women managers are more active and visible at the grassroots and local levels, in the position of deputy and assistant to the chief, than men are. A survey carried out at 260 state and non-state enterprises in Hanoi, Haiphong and HCMC by the Faculty of Sociology- Psychology indicates that, among the 260 most important managers at these enterprises, women accounted for only 10%, but occupied 28% of the second most important positions.

In 1993, the number of women managers increased in several sectors. However, the rate was still low and they mainly assumed secondary positions as deputies. This phenomenon is relatively common, not only in those sectors and industries where the rate of female labour is low, such as in the energy industry, but also in female labour-intensive areas such as trade. In 1993, in the trading sector women managers accounted for 11.2% of directors and

women general directors accounted for 8%. The number of women who assumed secondary positions as deputies accounted for 12% and 14% accordingly. These figures were much lower in the energy industry (Table 6.8).

Table 6.8. The rates of women managers of the total in trade and energy industries, 1993, %

Management level	Energy	Trade
Enterprise and equivalent level		
Department director	7.06	11.2
Department vice-director	9.91	12.0
Enterprise director	1.54	16.8
Enterprise vice-director	5.76	26.6
General company and equivalent level		
Department director	6.24	6.0
Department vice-director	15.18	17.0
Company director	-	8.0
Company vice-director	2.41	14.0

Sources: * *Ministry of Energy Report "women in the Energy Industry"*, Hanoi, 1994

** *Women's Work Division, General Trade Union of Vietnam, Report on the assessment of women's work of the Ministry of Trade, August, 1994*

(*) The rate of deputy- and directors of departments

This fact shows that, on the one hand, there is the potential to develop and increase the number of female enterprise managers in the future. On the other hand, business management practices are

creating new problems for women business managers that policy-makers must deal with.

The statistics, evidence and facts discussed above about women in social and economic management work indicate that there is a great potential here that needs further development and motivation.

The workforce of women managers in different areas, though small in size and number and facing a lot of problems and challenges, is providing very important management skills. This is not only a concrete expression of what women are doing to become masters of the society but evidence of how they constitute a pioneer team in the renovation of the nation. They are engaging themselves in dynamic, innovative activities to generate income for themselves and their families and forming smoothly running businesses in the new market economy.

The team of women managers has been expanding in quantity and improving in quality since the reforms. It can be said that the presence of women managers is one of the important contributions that the women's movement has made to the industrialization and modernization of the country. It would be difficult to imagine the economic reforms so far and the implementation of the social and economic development goals in the future without assessing the contribution of women leaders and managers.

A national report on the social and economic development of Vietnam given at a summit on social and economic development held in Copenhagen, Denmark, in March 1995, raised the question of how to provide opportunities for women to participate in management work. The report clearly stated the need for ensuring

that the rate of women participating in selected institutions goes up to 20 or 30% and 10-15% in consulting and advisory agencies to the government. For those enterprises or organizations with predominant number of women, it is recommended to increase the number of female managers to 30% of all levels. The successful implementation of this task and the achievement of this objective will surely bring about significant changes in the workforce of women managers. The potential of this force will certainly be developed and realized in order to make increasing contributions to the development of the nation in the coming century.

CHAPTER 7

WOMEN AND FAMILIES

1. Marriage

In comparison to the marriage regime imposed in the past, the growing numbers of free marriages based on love represent great progress in the liberation of women and men. Women and men, who are protected and supported by the society, now have increasing opportunities and choices when searching for the right lover, getting married and having children. The Marriage and Family Law states that "a man and a woman are free to choose their marriage partner. No one side is allowed to force the other, and no one is allowed to prevent a voluntary marriage..."

However, even in exercising this right, women are still suffering from more societal pressures than men. For example, as women have more duties and disadvantages such as age, they tend to get married earlier than men do. In many rural areas, women at the age of 30 and in some cases around 25 are considered too old to get married, while men at this age are still seen as "young", promising and, hence, have more choices. Thus, time and society's

perceptions tend not to support women in making choices and deciding to marry the man they want to. Indeed, the average marriage age for women in the entire country is often 1.3 years lower than that for men. The average marriage age is 23.2 years for women and 24.5 years for men. (Table 7.1). This gap is wider in rural areas in comparison to urban areas.

Table 7.1. Average marriage age for men and women by area, 1989

	Female	Males	Difference
Urban areas	24.7	26.5	1.8
Rural areas	22.7	23.4	0.7
National	23.2	24.5	1.3

Source: GSO, *Analysis on sample survey, Hanoi, 1991*.

What is clear is that in urban areas women are tending to seek stable jobs and careers before getting married. Hence, the average marriage age for urban women is often two years higher compared to rural women, and urban men tend to get married 3.1 years later than their rural counterparts. Policy factors, economic conditions and social opinions about marriage have a significant influence on women's right to free marriage. For example, women having children out of wedlock who do not want the community to know about it tend to state that they are married. This explains why the number of married men (11,890) was lower than the number of married women (12,487) in 1989 (GSO, 1991). The rate of single women such as widows, divorcees and those living separately from their husbands is four times higher than it is for men, while the opportunities for women to get remarried are fewer than they are for men (Table 7.2).

Table 7.2. Marital status by gender and sector of the population, age 12 and above, 1993, %

	Married	Divorced	Separated	Widows	Not married	Total
Female	53.71	1.38	1.24	9.95	33.72	100
Male	57.99	0.33	0.33	2.0	39.34	100
Rural areas	56.59	0.68	0.84	0.29	35.6	100
Urban areas	52.1	1.6	0.7	5.97	30.1	100

Source: GSO, *Survey on the living standards of the Vietnamese population, 1992-1993, Hanoi, 1994*.

The land assignment policy in rural areas nowadays and housing policies of the past took marriage into account. In rural areas, after getting married, a young couple could form a new independent family unit separate from their parents' family and accordingly be given a plot of land that consisted of residential and arable areas. This might explain why the number of family units comprised of a child and two parents in rural areas is larger than the number of extended families consisting of several generations living together. Obviously, economic incentives coupled with the desire to have more land and labour has a significant impact on marriage behavior (Le Thi, 1995).

In the state sector, especially in urban areas, married people and those living with their families used to have more advantages and could claim more benefits from the subsidized housing scheme and other social policies of the government. For example, married

people were freely given certain apartments and plots of land while single people received nothing and had to share with several others.

Housing and land subsidies have been abolished already, but preferential treatments in relation to marriage still exist. As a result, this constrains both men's and women's decision to get married; however, women are more affected.

Few professions, including secretarial jobs, open their doors to unmarried women. Most enterprises and institutions are reluctant to hire women who are unmarried or those who have no children. The reason is that employers do not want to bear the responsibility and costs of maternity leave or loss of work due to sick children, two situations that are common.

Early marriage persists in rural areas, especially in mountain and highland areas. According to official statistics on those who registered for marriage in rural areas, the rate of women who were married at age of 13-14 was 0.7%; for age of 15-17 it was 4.7% (GSO, 1991). Among several ethnic groups such as the Tay, Nung and Thai, the rate of people who married before the legal age was higher and reached 7-14% (Do Thuy Binh, 1995). This rate may be much higher in other ethnic groups.

Divorce is usually considered a negative side of marriage. Therefore, the data about divorce is frequently used to assess the situation of marriage. In fact, in regard to some issues, divorce is thought to have a positive effect, as in the saying "bitter medicine cures easily". When marriage cannot create happiness for every member of the family, divorce is not seen as an extreme measure. It is worth noting that women are usually active in dealing with conflicts that end up in divorce. Indeed, more women (35%) than men (24%) make divorce applications. According to an official

estimate, during the last five years, there were 20 thousands women, who suffered from violence by their husbands submitting divorce applications each year (Labor Newspaper, April 4, 2000).

Single women with children. The rate of single people aged 35-49, who are not married, is low: among them 29% are men and 7.4% women. Here it is necessary to mention the single women who do not marry for subjective and objective reasons. The point is that there are situations in which women have the need to have a baby. In order to satisfy this need, women may want to have sexual relations with one or more men in order to "ask for a baby" or "make a baby". That is why the social phenomenon of single mothers having children is becoming more common than before, especially since the regulations preventing discrimination toward children born out of wedlock have been effective. However, some such as Professor Le Thi Nham Tuyet are wondering if this practice will ultimately affect the happiness of married couples and bring back the polygamous marriages of the past. (Le Thi Nham Tuyet, 1995).

In their lives, women usually face heavier responsibilities than men to build a family and have a baby--especially a male. Many people regard this as the "duty" or "heavenly function" that women must perform if they do not want to be considered abnormal.

The underlying reason for this situation is partially related to women's economic dependency on men and children. Another reason is related to the belief that bearing children is the most valuable criteria for judging a woman's dignity. In other words, women are seen as nothing other than the means or machine for "producing a baby". In addition, there is the fact that parents rely on

their children when they become old, and hope to have someone to worship them after they die. Therefore, it can be said that, until social services and the state put limits on this way of thinking, it will still continue to persist.

It is surprising to discover that there are studies that verify the abnormal and unfortunate state of those who delay their marriage or do not marry. Even those couples without children are regarded as having lives without hope and happiness. Those families that have only one child or only daughters are seen as self-centred and inferior. Is it really true that only when a man or woman has a family or bears a child that they can really be happy?

There is no evidence to convincingly answer this question. However, there are signs indicating that major changes are taking place in the understanding of and thoughts about marriage, family and children. The fact that law and public opinion do not discriminate but show empathy toward the situation of single mothers is one good example. More importantly, this may mark the beginning of the separation of the concept of marriage from the concept of having a baby. This means that it is not necessary to marry in order to have the right to have a baby or to raise children.

2. Family

The concept of family here is similar in content to the concept of the household. The family is defined as consisting of people having marriage or blood relations and raising and nursing children. Legally, every family in a household is supposed to have a residential book that lists all the names of its members and heads. It is also clearly defined in this book how every person whose name is in it is related to the head of the family. A family may consist of several households and vice-versa.

The traditional one in a number of ways distinguishes a Vietnamese family, at present. First, there is evidence that the dominant type of family today is a single-family unit of small size, or 4-6 members. A survey completed in 1990 indicates that a two-generation family accounts for two-thirds of the total number of families in the country, while three-generation families and above account for only 25%, while families which have 4-6 members make up 60% (Tuong Lai, 1991).

Unlike an extended family made up of several generations, a single-family unit is comprised of only two generations--parents and children. An extended family is based on blood relationships, while a single family unit bases itself on the marriage relationship between one woman and one man.

The second feature of the Vietnamese family is related to the position of women within it. Unlike feudal families, such as Chinese ones, which attach more importance to the fathers' side and the relationship between the father and sons, a traditional family in Vietnam attaches more significance to the role of the woman.

In the past, "National legal codes" of Le Thanh Tong Kingdom (1483) and "Legal codes of Viet" of Gia Long Kingdom (1802-1820) reflected the progressive conception and laws of Vietnam in comparison to China. Unlike Chinese culture and laws, which placed great importance on men's roles in a society, Vietnamese conception of men's and women's position and roles are somewhat progressive and favorable for women's rights. For example, according to the official legal codes at that time, daughters and sons had equal rights to receive fortune from their parents. The official laws protected women's right against the husbands, who

after becoming mandarins and wanted to force their wives to leave and to marry new and younger women (Pham Thanh Van, 1999).

However, if you ask a woman who is the master or head of the family, she will not hesitate to answer the man. In fact, in many cases, a woman is actually quite powerful. She manages runs and engages in different types of work for the family, ranging from giving birth to raising children to controlling financial activities and developing the external and internal relations of the family. Women are active in participating in work that has been considered men's work, such as constructing a house, organizing weddings for children and finding good jobs. This can be clearly seen in the saying "*lenh ong khong bang cong ba*"- "*the order of the husband is not as powerful as that of the wife*," or in the way that a couple is addressed: "*vo chong*"- wife-husband, and not "*chong-vo*"- husband-wife.

The third feature is the traditional concept of a family that emphasizes agreement, as in "*thuan vo, thuan chong*"- "*both wife and husband agree*". This point is quite different from the feudal ideology that always tried to restrain and force a woman to follow the principle of "*tam tong*," or the three rules, which demand that the wife obey the husband. In other words, the Vietnamese family relationship is now step-by-step freeing itself from the obligations of feudal ideology and disagreeable customs.

These features due to changes in the economy, management and the social structure characterize a Vietnamese family. Since the family has begun to be promoted and encouraged as a basic economic unit of the agricultural economy, the number of single family units has been increasing significantly. In addition, the rate of families headed by women increased from 20% in 1980 to 26% in 1993.

In both rural and urban areas, separating from the extended family to form a new unit or having a child are the legal and fastest ways to form an independent family life. However, the position of women in the family, in general, is not equal to that of men.

As a member of an economic unit, i.e. a household, a woman often has to be more active and responsible than a man in providing food for the family. In other words, besides the housework that has been divided between the wife and husband in a traditional way, women often have to share productive work with men to ensure the survival and development of their families.

3. Gender Issues in Reproductive Health and Family Planning

It took a time to emerge the concept "*Reproductive health*" to be widely used. At first, according to the World Health Organization (1975) sexual health is the human complex of physical, emotional, intellectual and social aspects related to sexual life makes human life better in terms of personality, communication and love.

According to the definition given at the 1994 Conference in Cairo, reproductive health is healthy status in physical, mental and social terms, and not only without diseases or social disabilities but also without any disorders related to reproductive system, functions and processes. Thus reproductive health means that people can enjoy safely their sexual life and have the rights to have or not to have a baby as well as decide the time and number of children to deliver. Men and women have the rights to access information of and use or not use contraception methods that are safe, effective and reasonable for their income and not violating existing laws.

The Law of peoples health passed by the Vietnam National Assembly in 1989 stated that “any efforts to force or constraint family planning practices are strongly prohibited”, that women have the rights of abortion by their willing. However, Vietnam has more than one million abortion/ menstruation regulations each year. In 1998, one of every three cases of pregnancies finished by abortion. The 1 birth/1 abortion portion makes Vietnam one of the countries with highest rate of abortion in the world. It is important to note that abortion is harmful and dangerous for women’s health in general and reproductive health in particular. For example, the rate of mother’s death was 56/1000 cases in the Northern mountainous areas that are four times than in delta areas (16/1000 cases). Abortions have long negative effects on women’s health.

Another problem is girls, who also experienced abortion at early age. So teenagers with babies or “children feeding their babies” are not new in Vietnam today. Of those having an abortion, 25% are girls aged less than 18. This means that they are at risk of HIV/AIDS and STD’s on one side. Of newly HIV/AIDs patients 30% are women aged less than 30. On the other side, the health care system is not without problems; that is, teenagers are not provided with enough information services of contraception and safe reproductive health. In fact, half of teenagers do not know any contraception methods when they first engage in sexual life. Only one third of those teenagers having sex use contraception.

The rate of married women using contraception has increased over the last years. But by 1997, there is 24.7% of married women aged 15-49 do not use any methods of contraception. The most common method of contraception for women is IUD (38.5% of these women currently have IUD). But only 6% of the husbands use condom for contraception and sexual safety (Table 7.3).

Table 7.3. Contraception by married women at reproductive age, 1988-1997. (%)

Contraception	1988	1994	1997
Yes	53.2	65.0	75.3
No	46.8	35.0	24.7
IUD	33.1	33.3	38.5
Pills	0.2	2.1	4.3
Injectables	-	0.2	0.2
Condom for men	1.2	4.0	5.9
Female sterilization	2.7	3.9	6.3
Male sterilization	0.3	0.2	0.5
Periodic Abstinence	8.1	10.0	7.3
Withdrawal	7.0	11.2	11.9
Other	0.3	0.3	0.3

Source: *National Committee of Population and Family Planing. 1997 Demographic and health survey. Hanoi 3/1997. P. 42. Demographic survey in 1998, in 1994.*

Among couples without sons, 43.8% respondents stated that they feel “no problem” but 25.7% said they must have sons and 10.4% felt sad because of having no sons. Of married women, 45% respondents say that they want to have one son, 49% want two sons. Regarding to reasons for having sons, 48.5% respondents say that “having both son and daughter” is necessary for a happy life, 34.1% - having a son for ancestor worship and continuing father-line, 13.7% - for taking care of their ageing parents and the rest of them cited other reasons¹.

¹ Hoang Ba Thinh. “Gender conception and population policy”. *Journal of Science of women*. No.3/1998. P. 30-36.

4. Labour Division in the Family

Labour division between the husband and the wife in the family provides a clear expression of the status and role of women in the family and society. Examining the gender division of labour can provide information on how the liberation of women has been taking place in families and how families are affecting the development of women.

Family labor can be divided into two categories. The first category consists of economic activities that produce commodities and generate income. The other category does not consist of activities that produce goods and generate income in cash, but the tasks that women usually do in the family.

Family labor, in fact, is varied and it can be broken down into several types for simplicity as follows:

- Housework consists of shopping, preparing meals, washing, cleaning, repairing clothing, looking after the orchard, etc.
- Taking care of and raising children: baby-sitting, taking them for a walk, bathing and feeding them.
- Developing "external relations": visiting relative's friends, attending community meetings, parents' meetings.
- Making important decisions relating to funerals, weddings, house construction and repair, purchasing home equipment and furniture.

The most striking feature of housework is that it does not directly produce goods and generate income, but produces material and moral values that are not only important and necessary for women but for the family members and the society. The second

feature of housework is linked to the family tradition of Vietnam. That is, women always play a very important role in the organization and completion of the family's housework.

The burden of housework on women

The results of studies done on housework indicate the common tendencies of gender division of labor within family. Regardless of the differences between different groups of women and the division of labour between the husband and wife in a family, all groups tend to be uniform. First, in most cases, wives mainly do the housework. In less than 5% of families of all people working in all areas and sectors does the husband do most of the housework (Table 7.4 and Figure 7.1). A similar tendency can be found in taking care of and raising children. More than 30% of those surveyed replied "the wife" in response to the question "who in the family does this work, the husband or the wife?" and only 5% responded "the husband."

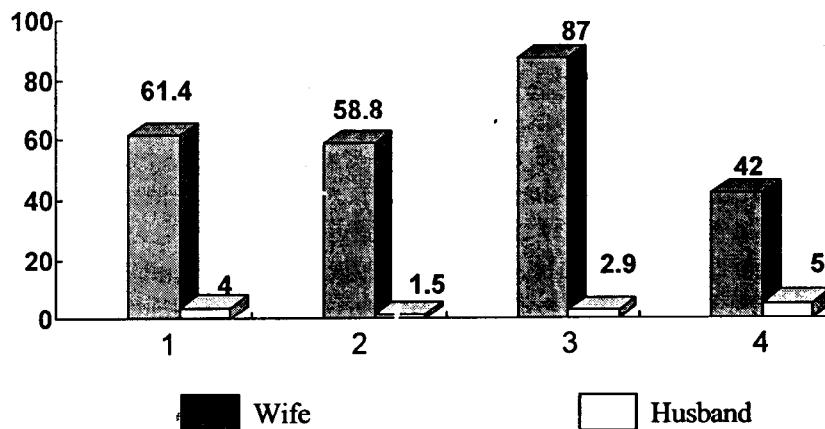
Table 7.4. Wives and husbands doing housework in working, farming and educated families, %

Family groups	All	State workers	Non-state workers	Farmers	Intellectual
Wife	62.3	61.4	58.8	87.0	42.0
Husband	3.3	4.0	1.5	2.9	5.0
Both	34.4	34.6	39.7	10.1	53.0

Second, the family division of labor between the wife and husband depends on the type of jobs and occupations they and their family members are engaged in. Among different family groups, the group of educated and intellectual families where the wife mainly does the housework makes up the smallest share, 42% compared to 87% in farming families. This can be interpreted as

showing that, in a highly educated family, there are more opportunities for the equal division of labour between the husband and wife. However, the traditional perception that housework is women's work is still deeply rooted in the mind of many families.

Figure 7.1. Wife and husband's participation in housework, in different family groups, %



Notes: 1. State workers' families;
2. Non-state workers
3. Farmers'
4. Educated families

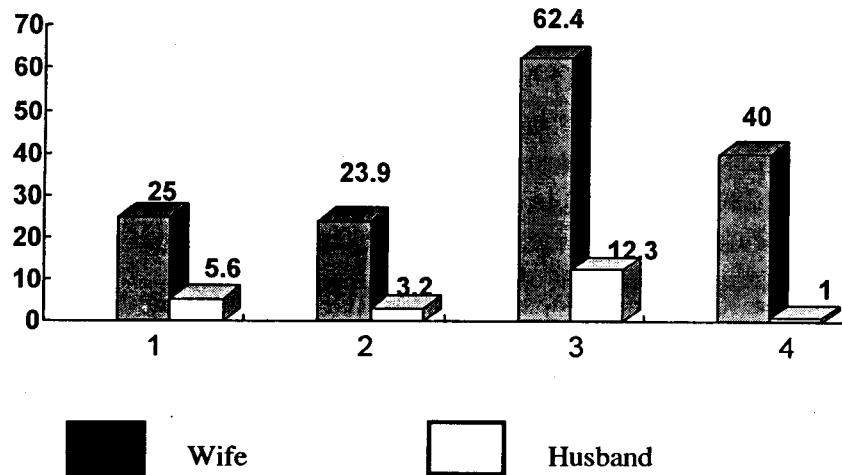
The task of looking after and raising children is often complicated and difficult, requiring the participation of both the wife and husband. Overall, this labour is not purely housework because it includes teaching literacy and educating a person.

A significant number of respondents reveal that both the wife and husband do the housework in the family (Table 7.5.). In rural areas, many couples believe that raising children is consists only of feeding them and doing the housework. Therefore, farming families have the highest rate, 62.4%, of wives who do all the housework (Figure 7.2).

Table 7.5. Wife and husband's participation in housework in Working, farming and educated families, %

Family groups Owner	All	State workers	Non-state workers	Farmers	Intellectual
Wife	37.8	25.0	23.9	62.4	40.0
Husband	5.5	5.6	3.2	12.3	1.0
Both	56.7	69.4	72.9	25.3	59.0

Figure 7.2. Wife and husband's participation in raising children in working, farming and educated families, %



Notes: 1. State workers
2. Non-state workers
3. Farmers
4. Intellectual

In 40% of educated families, wives do most of the housework and raising of children. Is this because both the wife and husband in more educated families are involved in and concerned with raising children? It is very possible that in these families raising children is considered to consist not only of feeding and clothing them but also educating them, and hence, it attracts the husband's participation. In addition, the rate of educated women taking care of and raising children is lower than that of female farmers. This may be explained by the use of relevant social services such as kindergartens, pre-school education and home teachers by educated women.

Even in the cases where both the wife and husband participate in doing housework and raising children, the wife often does a larger portion of the work. Interviews with different couples indicate that even in the case of an equal division of labour, the wife often assumes the role of main "*actor*" while the husband plays the role of an assistant to her or titular "leader".

In fact, it is important to take into account their specific lifestyles. The quantity of housework usually done by female farmers to develop the household economy (such as the 71% of them who are engaged in husbandry, 45.6% in off-farm activities and 46.2% in services) is not insignificant. The tendency to search for jobs outside the home, which is becoming common nowadays, is increasing the amount of housework for rural women.

However, what deserves attention here is that, while overall both the wife and husband do share the housework in educated families (59% in raising and educating children, 66% in economic activities; 77% in organizing the family life) in fact, women still do more than men. A time use survey of 245 households in Ho Chi Minh City found that each couple has the average number of two children. About 50% of husbands have never done housework, 30%

- do it but not regularly and only 15% often help their wives in doing housework. What do men-husbands do when they have free time? These men seem to not easily answer this question and a few of them said they drink with their friends (Women Newspaper, February 27, 1999).

While development and job opportunities are often more limited for women than for men, the fact that they spend more time doing the housework is a major obstacle to achieving male-female equality in the family and in the society. Certainly, the concept of equality must not be understood mechanically in the arena of the family. The equality of a husband and wife in terms of the division of labour in the family does not mean dividing it in half; both must do the same work or the husband must help his wife do it. The question is how to make a clear-cut, reasonable division so that each of them feels responsible for doing it and, at the same time, can develop himself or herself as well as have opportunities to join social activities.

Domestic decision-making by women

Male-female inequality in the family is not clearly defined due to the decisive voice of women in the family. Regarding the situation of labor division in the family as we have described above, the wife does more work in the family than the husband does, and the husband seems to have more influence in decision-making than the wife. Surveys carried out in several communes in the northern delta areas indicate that this model of decision-making is very common in rural families. Up to 50% of respondents stated that the husband makes the biggest contribution to the family income, only 18% of respondents say that the wife makes the biggest contribution. This correlation has been found in decision-making regarding marriage, the career choices of children and large

expenditures. This means that the husband is often considered the main person who can influence and make all of the decisions (Vu Manh Loi, 1990). However, more than 30% of respondents believe that both the wife and husband share decision-making in all areas (Tuong Lai, 1991).

The husband often assumes the work of "external relations development". For example, the results of a survey undertaken by the CFWS in three communes in Tuyen Quang, Quang Nam, Da Nang and Long An provinces indicate the following: on average, the wife does 38.2% and the husband does 48.3% of the total community work. These days, however, this gap is closing. This reconciles with the reality that the number of men migrating for jobs and the number of women becoming family heads has been increasing recently. In this case the wives do all the community work.

Decision making by women in family. The question here is whether the husband has a decisive voice in the family. In the past, a family in which there was a man fulfilling the paternal role of the husband was considered the model of the typical family. The man had a decisive, influential role in the relationship between father and son, husband and wife, brothers, etc., in the family. Even in this type of family, the authoritative role of the man was important only in the sense that he had to create an example of a responsible, just and respectable person for his children. It is true that in the relation "nam ton nu ti"- (man dominates and woman is subordinate), the woman still played a decisive role, which was sometimes more important than the man's, in building up the prosperity of the family (Tran Dinh Huou, 1989).

Most of answers on the question "who has final voice in making decisions on important issues within family?" show the

predominant role of husbands over their wives (23.7% verse 18.1%) (Table 7.6).

Table 7.6 Wife and husband making decision in families, %

	All	State	Non-state	Farmer	Intellectual
Wife	18,1	5,0	5,0	24,4	20,0
Husband	23,7	17,8	17,8	44,5	25,0
Both	58,2	77,2	77,2	31,1	55,0

Women working in the non-state sector seem to have a more decisive role in making decisions at home than those working in the state sector. This may be explained by the fact that they work harder and make more money in the non-state than in the state enterprises.

A close look at the domestic decision making process reveals that husband tend to have final voice in making a decision on vital issues such as buying valuable things, building houses, choosing occupations for their children. About 50% of women believed that their husbands contributed much income for their family budget (Vu Manh Loi, 1990). However, 30% of the respondents said that both wife and husband make a domestic decision (Tuong Lai, 1991). A household survey tends to indicate that women as actively as their husbands participate in community events. This is greatly affected by the fact that men are more often then women are out of home, while their wife must play a "household head" role in communicating with neighbours and relatives and others in the same community.

The division of labour between the husband and wife in the family should represent an equal economic relation in which women are not assistants to men. But colleagues and co-workers in

all social and economic activities and, at the same time have a decisive voice in labour, farming, handicraft and small industries. In petty trade, men have similar role. All finance and spending plans are in the hands of women, as in the saying that women are the "lock and key of the wardrobe" of the family. It can be said that the role of the housekeeper is very formal and important (Nguyen Tu Chi, 1989).

In fact, a person who makes decisions is the head or master and can influence all other related issues and resources (property and labour) in the family. In some cases, a woman may be a cashier or a book- keeper but how to spend the money depends on the husband, especially for large expenditures. In recent sociological studies, the answer to the question "who decides on the main expenditures in the family?" more and more often is "both the wife and husband". This means that the situation in which both the husband and wife participate in making decisions on spending in the family is tending to become common in families in both rural and urban areas. However, this is not sufficient information to enable us to conclude that the wife has the decisive role. Another question needing more in-depth study is who has the final say when both the wife and husband are involved in the discussion of some household matter?

It is surprising that the data and evidence obtained from different surveys and interviews clearly indicate an unequal situation in the division of family labour. Although women are doing more work than their husbands are, the wife's say in the decisions appears to be half as important compared to what the husband wants. How can this inequality be explained? Why is it that the position of women in the family does not reflect their important role?

The answer may be related to the following basic realities:

- Women's status in the family is still neglected, due to perceptions still deep in the minds of many people and the society.
- Feudal and conservative thoughts about of the position and role of women in doing housework are still widespread, especially in rural areas. This system of values has not caught up with significant changes in the economic structure. The ideology of overvaluing men and neglecting women (*trong nam khinh nu*) prevents women from convincing their husbands to share the burden of housework with them.

The society attaches little significance to housework and lacks incentives to attract men to do housework alongside the women in the family. The issue of liberating women in the family has not been addressed at the level of reforms and the renewal of the society and economy.

The low family income level does not allow women to widely use social services and other means to ease the burden of housework.

The following conflicts may emerge from the above situation:

- Increasing the participation of women in social and economic activities may be difficult as long as their role in decision-making in the family is limited. This does not allow women use their full knowledge, experience and ability outside the family.
- There is a conflict between the increasing requirements for high qualifications and skills by the society and the market economic mechanism and the very limited possibilities for

investing in the personal development of women. Moreover, the prevailing system of values and the division of labour in the family prevent women from developing their qualifications and skills in many areas. In the end, this situation could lead to the waste of human resources at a cost to the whole society.

- The time and requirements for educating children in the family have become the core issues of the family and society, however, women face decreasing amounts of time that can be set aside for children's education, especially in poor families.

- There are also conflicts between the "new" and the "old", between the "West" and the "East", and between the "traditional" and the "modern" in the perception of the family relationship. For example, 91.6% of women surveyed support the model of family with few children, but, at the same time, 30.4% of them are planning to have the third child (Tuong Lai, 1991).

5. Women's Studies and Sociology of Family

Marriage and family provide a social structure that holds the number one position in the social, economic and cultural lives of many different nations in the world. In Asian countries, including Vietnam, family relations have always had a very important position in the system of traditional and modern cultural values. For centuries now, a stable family has been considered the basis and starting point for an individual to be able to perform significant work socially. This point may be better understood through the saying "*te gia, tri quoc, binh thien ha*"-- "*serving the family, leading the nation and stabilizing the people*", and in particular through one

that expresses the perception of the importance of equality between a wife and husband in Vietnam: "*thuan vo thuan chong be dong tat can*"-- "a good relationship between the wife and husband in the family can fill the Eastern Ocean".

The modern perception of the meaning of the life held by youth allows us to see clearly the very important position of these traditional values. A survey undertaken on 374 students of different universities and colleges asked the question, "what makes life meaningful? And offered a choice of five major factors. "A stable family life" was chosen by 310 people, or 82.9 % of the total; "good friendships" was chosen by 239, or 63.9%; 3) "educational attainment" was chosen by 195, or 52 %; "love" was selected by 155, or 41.4 %; and "favourable job" by 135, or 30.1% (Phung Huu Phu and Lam Ba Nam, 1994).

In studying the family, women's studies always tries to analyze the expressions, conditions and mechanisms affecting the position and role of women in the family. The positive traditional and cultural values of equality, respect and the mutual aid of the wife, husband, children and different generations in the family are being highlighted and promoted. Negative and outmoded understandings, on the other hand, regarding the division of family labor, which place the burden of housework and raising children on women and mothers who must fulfil their "traditional", "natural" duty, must be sharply criticised.

It can be said that male-female inequality in the family has been inherited and maintained from generation to generation in, first of all, perceptions about marriage, family and the qualities of the wife and husband. For example, 32% of women and men say that "knowing how to take care of the family and do housework" was

one of the most important qualifications of a woman, while, at the same time, only 6% of them saw it as the most important qualification of a man. However, 72% of them say that being healthy (at least for economic purposes) is necessary for both men and women, and both of them have to be equally responsible for family income contribution (Vu Tuan Huy, 1995).

What need more attention are the stereotypes of the family and of gender, which are still very common at present in the perception of the differences between sons and daughters. For example, 43% of people questioned said that both the son and daughter must be educated with "a good attitude toward working", while only 9% of them believe that boys need to develop a "good ability to do housework, compared to 37% who said daughters need to be good at this (Phung Huu Phu and Lam Ba Nam, 1994). It is clear that some very significant changes need to be made in these areas.

Women's studies of the family researches the formation of and changes in the position of women in relation to marriage, family and society. For example, women's studies indicate that basic changes in family life have a direct or indirect link to the position and role of women in relation to family members. Therefore, women's studies of the family tries to highlight and criticize factors causing male-female inequality, as well as discover and encourage positive factors of social justice and gender equality in the family.

Another phenomena of gender injustice within family is violence toward women. This practice happens in various forms to various extents and can be observed in different types of family from nuclear to extended family, from young to elderly people,

from working to intellectual families. Social workers noted that family has tended to develop in the last years (Women Newspaper, August 25, 1999). A survey of 2000 respondents in Ho Chi Minh City found that there are a lot of types of violence including biting, fighting and even sexual violence. Nearly 97% of family violence reported are male violence against women.

Researchers and social workers suggested that communication of gender justice and man-woman equality should focus on both women and men. The experience in this field shows that most activities of women movement did not involve men's participation. For example, one-year propaganda against domestic violence with nearly 5,000 participants but few men were involved in 1998-1999.

It may be seen that in having a clearly defined object of study as such, women's studies of the family are quite different from other studies. For example, the study of the Viet race has only " nodded its head once more on the issue of the family...just to perceive, in fact, nothing laying under the paint covering the surface of already-existing concepts..." (Tuong Lai, 1995). The sociology of the family has been trying to research "everything"--from the structure and function of the family to relation between the triangle of father, mother and children and the triangle of individual, family and society. With this methodology, the sociology of the family is hardly able to address issues of women's studies of the family.

Women's studies are interested in examining causes and consequences of family changes on women's lives. Violence and any other practices promoting gender inequality must be reported, discouraged and criticized so that gender justice and gender equality are further promoted.

In summary, while women researchers have already defined the object of their study, for sociologists the family is still "a term that is very difficult to define, a concept that is loosely defined in the terminology of sociology" (Tuong Lai, 1995). That is, women's studies of the family discover and promote factors that can improve the status of women in the family. This is very important to facilitate their contribution to family and marriage and make the family a source of happiness for every individual, woman as well as man, and to enable it to serve as the foundation for the development of social justice and civilization.

PART III

WOMEN, GENDER AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC POLICY REFORM

CHAPTER 8

SOCIAL POLICIES TOWARDS WOMEN

1. The Classification of Social Policies

There are at least two ways of defining a social policy. First, a social policy can be understood as a state policy aimed at implementing stated objectives in the interest of various mass groups of people in the society. In a progressive society, social policies reflect the desire and will of the people and are to be realized by the people.

This definition emphasizes the decisive and important role of the government, which is a group of people directly and indirectly participating in the policy-making process. That is why it can be inferred that the more women engaged in the making of concrete policy, laws or regulations, the more comprehensively and precisely social policy will reflect the needs and interests of women.

Second, a social policy can be considered a product and a process of institutionalizing the course and direction of state policy through the identification of objectives, the directing of actions and

the allocation of social resources. This understanding emphasizes both the active roles of policy makers and implementing bodies as well as other social and environmental factors, including different groups within the populace.

Thus, as a social process, social policies shift along with changes taking place in the political, cultural and socio-economic life of the country. That is why it is very important to have a mechanism for amending, adjusting, and improving social policies to fit the needs of every stage of development.

As a product of the social process, social policies on women reflect not just the needs and interests of women; they also reflect the desires and interests of men and the society as a whole. Social policies are aimed at creating favourable conditions for women to develop their capacity and participate in different social activities, ensuring social justice and gender equality.

The social policies that are discussed in this chapter make up a system of legal documentation concretized at different levels and affect women as a gender or several specific groups of women. These documents are not only limited to narrow social areas, but they also cover other related areas, such as economics. Social policies, in this case, are neither limited to policies made at a particular level based on a specific degree of institutionalization, but include all types of legalized policy regulations promulgated by the government, approved by the National Assembly and affirmed by the related ministries and state agencies in existence since the birth of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). With this broad meaning, the understanding of a social policy can be rather relative, and can refer to the legal system affecting or relating to women in general or to groups of women in particular. Thus, this is what it means to talk about policies on gender or women.

Policies about women, within a framework of general policies, can be defined as social policies because they cover social relations and regulate the relationship of the two genders. They may also be understood as multi-faceted policies, because they link and relate to all other kinds of policies such as economic, cultural, ethnic, and religious ones. In fact, policies about women will only bring about the desired result of equality between women and men and gender equity if they go beyond their narrow meaning and expand to other policy areas such as economic, financial, managerial and employment policies. The source of gender inequality will only be overcome by a system of effective policies in all these areas.

As mentioned above, any policy--the ultimate objective of which is to serve the people--relates to and directly or indirectly affects women. The rate of the occurrence of policies about women may be different. The ways in which women are included in policies may also vary. As a result, policies on women may be classified as follows:

General policies. They are not directly aimed at women's or gender issues but may have effects on women and gender, affecting women's access to and use of resources like land, payments, taxation, etc. The main feature of these policies is the lack of the inclusion of women's or gender issues in any of chapters, provisions or articles.

Policies on marriage and the family. These are general legal provisions regulating a group of people, including both women and men, newly entering into marriage and family relations. These policies may have great impact on women. General policies and laws having concrete provisions regarding the roles of women and men are aimed at encouraging or limiting specific actions or

behaviours in marriage and family relations as aspects of gender, husband-wife, or son-daughter relations, etc.

Special policies on women. This group of policies includes specific provisions as inclusions in general documents. For example, this describes a chapter on female labor in the Labor Code, or a policy that is made and applied to a certain group of women, such as a policy on female employees or a policy on maternity leave for state female workers and employees, etc. Policies of this type specify women's issues in detail.

Social policies on women may be classified according to form and to the degree of institutionalization through legal documents such as the Constitution, laws, decrees, resolutions, or decisions of the party, government and state. For example, these documents include article 24 of the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (1959); articles 57 and 63 of the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (1980); and articles 54 and 63 of the Constitution (1992). These specify the rights of women to vote and become political candidates and prohibit discrimination against women, among other things.

Chapters on vocational training labor contracts, and night shifts contained in the Labor Law (1949) provide for the protection of the interests of female workers and employees. The Labor Code (1994) also contains a chapter entitled "Special provisions on female workers and employees".

Article 30 of Decree 77/SL, dated May 22, 1950 and passed by the President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, provides that female citizens can enjoy maternity programs; Resolution 31/CP dated March 8, 1967 and passed by the government outlines the role of women in the construction and defence of the country;

and Decision 7/HDBT dated May 1, 1983 and passed by the Council of Ministers concerns the maternity provisions for female state workers and employees.

Social policies on women may be also classified by their objectives. For instance, policies have been made to create conditions for women to participate in productive activities, to encourage and strengthen the capacity of women or to motivate women in social and economic managerial activities.

Taking into account the different aspects and features of the quality of the life, social policies may be classified into groups, such as those policies regarding education issues, health care for children and mothers, policies on labor and employment and policies on housing, for example.

There may be other factors that may be considered in the classification of social policies, but the important issue is that all social policies on women have common features regarding the contents and objectives of the policy and the structure for developing and implementing it.

2. The Object of a Policy

Social policies on women may vary, as women do not make up a homogenous social group. Different groups of women in the society have needs for different policies. The identification of the object of a policy has been sometimes been raised as a question due to the limited resources for the implementation of policies. In other words, in the process of implementing policies, prioritization is also a concern for social groups and in specific cases. The object of a policy varies in consideration of the major concerns and issues to be dealt with at every stage of social and economic development.

Despite the differences between various groups of women, such as rural vs. urban, as a gender, women make up the common object of several policies. In this case, these policies include basic legal documents significant for political, social and economic life, namely in the constitution.

Constitutional provisions are effective for every citizen. Several provisions of the Constitution specify concrete issues about women and gender relations. These provisions are uniform for every woman as the object of the Constitution.

The Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (1992) clearly states: "Female and male citizens are equal in political, social, cultural, economic and family matters (Article 54). And "Female and male workers and employees who are doing similar work shall be equally paid..." (Article 63). Thus, according to the Constitution, women in the whole territory of Vietnam regardless of race, occupation and sector are the object of the principle of gender equality as mentioned above. Women have been regarded as the uniform object of this significant legal document.

Legal documents that treat women as a uniform group and object of policy are not numerous. In fact, a policy is made to solve a certain issue or a group of issues; hence, every policy often focuses on certain inclusions relating to a certain group of people as its major object, such as policies on women. Every policy identifies a certain group of women as its object. For example, one of these types of policies is the Labor Code of 1994. The Labor Code has been defined as "applicable to every working person, every organization and individual of different economic sectors employing labor by the labor contract arrangement..." (A working person is defined as one who is at least 15 years old, able to work and enter a labor contract). The labor employer is defined as one "...who is at least 18 years old, hires, employs and pays wages..." This means that the whole Labor Code, and especially what is specified in

chapter 10 of the Code on "Specific Provisions on Female Workers and Employees," are applicable to the group of women working for the state sector and entering labor contracts, as well as the group of women employing laborers.

This example indicates that to regulate labor relations, the object identified for the Labor Code does not cover all women but certain groups of them. Labor contract relations distinguish these groups. That is, these are women working under any labor contract or as any labor employer.

Not all policies promulgated for women so far, however, have defined their object. Some of them cover women in very loose terms. Women included in these policies are of different groups and from different occupations and work places. No definition or principle has been identified here for specific applicability to an object.

Resolution 176a/HDBT of the Council of Ministers, dated December 1984, regarding the strengthening of the capacity of women in the construction and defence of the socialist country, provides a good example. This resolution stated: "...The Union motivates female workers, farmers and artisans to actively participate in production activities..." and "The Union educates women to encourage and motivate their husbands and sons to fulfil their national service..." (Section I); it includes a list of occupations and works that are relevant and appropriate for women and should be prioritized for female workers (Section II); and it states that "People's Councils at different levels shall have at least one-third female representatives (Section III). "Is that the object of Resolution 176a, as stated in the document, and does it represent the members of the Women's Union of Vietnam working in different jobs and at various social positions who are already married? If so, this

provision has not been included in the resolution. If not, can it be that all women are the objects of the resolution?

The above example is not the only one; there are a series of policies relating to women. What we would like to say here is that the uniformity and consistency of what is included in policy documents has not received adequate attention; as a result, identification becomes unclear. There is also the argument that, as the goal of making a policy is to motivate and guide the identification of the policy object is not an important and concrete matter. In fact, this does not reconcile with the content, degree and method of institutionalizing the decisions made at the level of the Council of Ministers.

The fact that the policy object and the way of identifying it have not been clarified adequately has had a significant impact on the legality and effect of a policy. First of all, it makes it impossible to monitor undefined groups of people as policy targets. Second, it is also difficult to make an assessment of the implementation and effect of a policy when it focuses on a very loose group of people from different sectors and lacks specific criteria. This is not yet taking into account what might happen during implementation, such as omission and duplication in the content and policy objectives.

Thus, there may be two approaches to covering women as the object of policy. First, a concrete principle of identifying the policy object should be worked out. Second, a general group of objects or various groups of objects must be defined. Policies using the first method above to identify objects may include provisions on maternity welfare for state female workers and employees, on the hard and dangerous work where female workers are not to be used, and on social insurance for state workers and employees.

More general policies may be policies on family or policies aimed at strengthening the role of Vietnam Women's Union (VWU) at different levels.

The former may have the implementation mechanism worked out and may contain clearly defined legal characteristics. The latter are more useful for guiding and motivating the creation of documents during mass campaigns.

Policies, which have been made so far, especially about women, have defined the object in certain ways. The most common way has been by basing it on different economic sectors.

Most social policies that have been recently made are for female state workers and employees, that is, female workers in the state-owned economic sector. Policies for this group of women, in general, have been structured neatly, have high legality, and have budgets allocated to guarantee the formation of an apparatus for monitoring and implementation. The amendments and additions to the material scheme for female workers and employees, included in Decision 7/HDBT of the Council of Ministers (January 15, 1983) is one example. Article 2 of this decision states "After delivering a baby, a state-employed female shall have an allowance and financial support to buy things for the newborn as follows: 300 VND for the first and/or the second baby and 150 VND for the third baby. In addition, she can buy food grain and clothing for the baby at state subsidized prices..."

Very few policies have been made concerning female workers in the collective sector. For female members of industrial co-operatives and petty industries, there have been only some temporary provisions on the material scheme with very limited legality. The policy on "Temporary provisions on social insurance and collective welfare in industrial co-operatives and petty

businesses," signed by the Chairman of the Central Union of Industrial Co-operatives in September 1973, is a good example. This document states that "as a co-operative member, a female worker shall have two months of leave and payment according to the co-operative capacity..." This means that the implementation of social schemes for female workers and employees in the collective and co-operative sector depends on the concrete conditions of the business units. In fact, these schemes have been actualized at several profitable co-operatives that have been able to maintain welfare funds for their workers.

Female workers in the agricultural sector have not been subject to any policy and regulation. In the North, there was some sort of support for organizing kindergartens and pre-schools in order to indirectly assist female agricultural co-operative members and elderly people, including elderly women. These policies were mainly implemented in the 1970s and 1980s in most agricultural co-operatives and were based mainly on the personal perceptions of the chairmen of co-operatives. In the early 1990s, this type of assistance decreased rapidly and now no assistance is provided.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, female workers in private and foreign invested enterprises and businesses have been covered as policy objects through several related provisions, such as one relating to maternity leave.

Letter of circulation 09, dated April 18, 1989 provides guidelines on the implementation of hired labor and social policies in non-state sectors (based on Decrees 27/HDBT and 28/HDBT of March 9, 1989, and Decree 170/HDBT of November 14, 1988). It states: "Pregnant workers shall have the right to visit doctors, take leave and enjoy payment of 100% of monthly wages for the first and the second deliveries. Leave duration and the level of payments

shall be decided on by the trade union, where a trade union exists, by the worker representatives, where there is no trade organization, through negotiation with employers..." (Session VI, Article 1, point b). *Provisions of the Regulations on Enterprises with Foreign Investment* (of Decree 223/HDBT of the Council of Ministers dated June 22, 1990) clearly states: "a female worker having a baby shall have a leave of 12 weeks and enjoy payment of 100% of her monthly wages..." (Article 37).

These provisions reflect the great efforts made by the state and government to expand the application of policies, namely regarding maternity leave and pay, to the large number of working mothers, regardless of the economic sectors they are working in. Due to the lack of appropriate monitoring mechanisms and provisions on implementation, however, the guidelines found in these documents are limited. Putting a policy into action depends very much on the perception and understanding of leaders and the financial realities of every business unit. Consequently, they have not yet brought about significant results for female workers in non-state sectors, especially in private and foreign-invested enterprises.

In short, policies promulgated for groups of women defined by economic sectors might be meaningful and useful for only a few women in the society, much fewer than the number mentioned in the Constitution or in other directives and policy documents. A group of female state workers and employees and a group of co-operative female members make up only 10% of the total number of women in the whole country. This number even began to decrease when the state sector began undergoing restructuring and when many industrial and handicraft co-operatives were dissolved in the late 1980s.

The 1994 Labor Code marks a major move from identifying policy objects by economic sectors to identifying issues to address as so-called policy issues. For example, one of the policy issues to be dealt with in 1990 was labor relation in the changing environment. The Labor Code was to meet the requirements of the new changes by regulating labor relations. The law was extended to cover all those who were in a labor relationship, regardless which sector they were in.

Disadvantaged Women. The application of a policy issue as the base for identifying the policy object allows for the consideration of different groups of people, and therefore, the inclusion of them as objects of a certain policy. Whether emerging social issues appear on the list of priorities for further consideration and become policy issues depends on other factors; first of all, the general direction and intent of the party and government, and then the seriousness and possible consequences of that issue, as well as whether a social issue would be addressed through making a certain policy and to what extent.

Elderly Women. According to the law of population growth, the rate of elderly people in Vietnam gradually increases over time. Women make up more than half of the elderly population. The rate of elderly people increased from 7.1% in 1979 to 7.2% in 1989 with about 57-58% being women (Le Thanh Binh, 1999). This means that the quality of health services and living standards of the population are much improved in the past two decades. The average age of Vietnamese doubled from 32 years old in 1945 to 68 years in 1989 and 70-71 years in 2000. The number of women increases along with ageing. Of the people aged above 100 there are 73% women and 27% men. Most elderly people live in rural areas with poor infrastructures and health service systems.

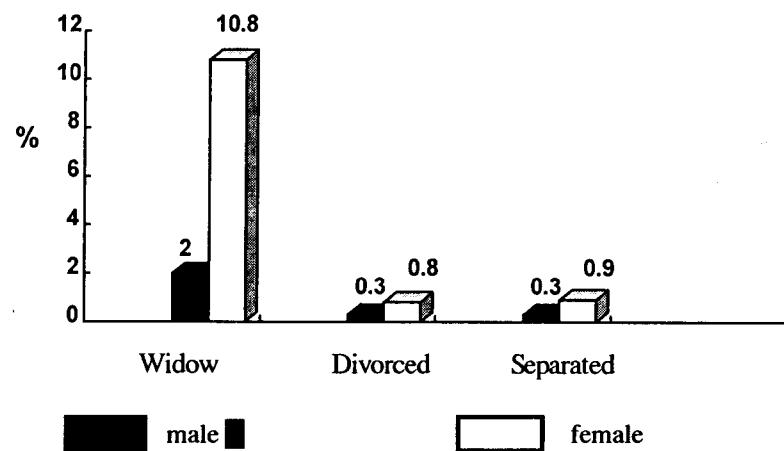
In comparison with men, elderly women are more likely than their counterparts to live alone. They tend to feel isolated and bored. Widowed men tend to marry again and form a new family. However, most elderly people live with their son's family and their grandchildren. This helps them a lot in their life.

In relatively poor social infrastructure conditions, a Vietnamese family plays great role in providing elderly people with living necessities. Therefore, more than half of the ageing population said they are satisfied with their own life. However, elderly men and women are not without generation conflicts and changes in family structure.

During the transition and restructuring of the economic management mechanism, like any change in social and economic life, elderly people may be one of the most vulnerable. They may be less flexible to change and may become physically weakened or more sensitive and their ability to work decreases over the time. These factors may lead them into danger of conflicts in the family and society.

Although both elderly women and men are affected by the disadvantages of change, elderly women may be more vulnerable because they may have less property, skills and experience than men do. The persistence of customs in many rural areas means that widows have less chance to get remarried especially when they already have children. Isolation, the necessity of earning a living, their declining health situation as they become older, and loneliness often threaten these women. The number of widows is more than 2.4 million (1989), while widowers number 402,000 persons, or one-sixth the rate for women. The rate of single women, due to different reasons such as divorce or separation from the husband, is also higher for women than for men (Figure 8.1.)

Figure 8.1. The rate of single women/men of the total number of women/men aged of 15 and above, %.



Source: General Statistical Office. *The analysis of the 1991 sample survey results*. p. 77.

The situation in which too many young women have babies, have too many children in a short time, work too hard, or suffer from malnutrition means that many women are exhausted when they reach old age. There were more than 3.3 million women over 60 years old in 1989 and 3.6 million in 1999. Among them there are war invalids and disabled, but the majority are simply old, ill and unable to work.

Along with the trend of young couples separating early from their parents, the number of two-generation families is increasing. As a result, elderly people do not have opportunities to obtain the care and assistance of their children. In addition, the signs of materialism in family and individual relations are beginning to penetrate into many families, worsening the relations between the parents, children and grandchildren. There are many cases in which elderly people are poorly treated by their children or abandoned.

Up to now, non-working and especially elderly women have not been covered by any policy on women. Non-working women who enjoy pensions and other fair treatment policies make up a very small percentage of elderly women. They are facing a number of problems; elderly people, in general, and elderly women, in particular, have not yet been covered by any particular social policy.

The situation became serious when several forms of agricultural co-operative and village support and assistance were abolished. Some forms of voluntary support for elderly people have been emerging, but they are still limited in number and scope and face many problems in functioning and expanding.

Disabled women make a group that may be the most disadvantaged. Like elderly women, they have a little chance and possibility of integrating into the current, exciting life of the market mechanism. However, unlike elderly people, they have to face other pressures from society. The social perception that emphasizes appearances and the role of woman as mother make it more difficult for those living nomadic lives to integrate into the surrounding society.

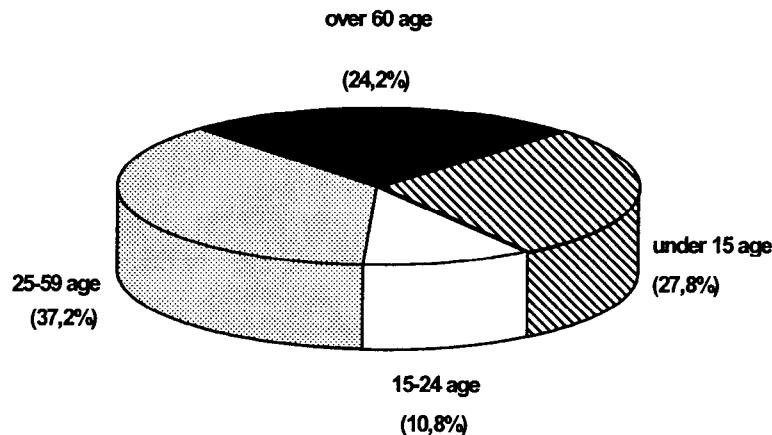
A study on the primary reasons for their disabilities shows that not all of them were born disabled. A study done by the International Labor Organization (ILO) in the Asia-Pacific region shows that 32.3% of disabled women were born that way, 47.7% became disabled as the result of disease and illness, and 20% as the result of accidents. Having many babies, lacking health care during pregnancy and malnutrition are the major causes of illness among women (ESCAP, 1994). In Vietnam, the rate of women who enjoy basic health care at community health care centers decreased from 90% in 1985 to 85% in 1994 (The Ministry of Health, 1994). Unforeseen complications during childbirth, such as haemorrhaging, increased from 1042 cases to 1356 cases in 1993 (The Ministry of

Health, 1993). Long-lasting and widespread war also resulted in a great number of invalids.

A small number of invalids and disabled have been enjoying special treatment policies and invalid programs, namely those who served during the war. Another small number may enjoy disabled support in the event that they have been state workers or employees. The rest have to live on their own means or that of their families and relatives. Recently, the contributions of generous individuals and organizations have become another source of support to these people.

Thus, the situation of most disabled and invalid people, of them 60% women, has not been considered a social issue (MOLISA), and two-thirds of them are living under the poverty line. It is noteworthy that among disabled women, many are young and many are also quite old; this means that the young ones still have a long time to live and the others have to face the difficulties of old age and illness (Figure 8.2.) This reality would become the real concern of the society, state and government through specific policies.

Figure 8.2. Age structure of Disabled and Invalid Women



Source: MOLISA, *Data on social Labor*, December, 1993.

In recent years, the government has spent a part of the employment program budget to support several vocational training centers for the disabled and invalids. However, female invalids and disabled, at present, have not gained enough attention from the society as well as from policy makers at different levels.

Recently, the focus of social policies for women, as we have analyzed, has prioritized state workers and employees. This position stems from simply understanding the steps for building socialism, and this approach to identifying the policy object did work at certain stages. Women and people in general were encouraged to become state workers and staff members. As a result, the state sector absorbed a great number of female workers in the 1960s and 1970s, and many women had joined the social labor force in management.

At present, the selection of the object of social policy, obviously, cannot ignore the achievements obtained by the economic reforms. The policy of multi-sector economic development oriented toward socialism has provided new opportunities and equity for a number of women to make use of their abilities. Every citizen, regardless of sex, economic sector, political position, social-class occupation, and what they did in the past, is being encouraged to become rich for themselves and their families. This policy induced the creation of new social policies, but can these social policies cover all groups of women? Obviously, no.

Therefore, at present, policies on women are facing the challenge of defining a target and using them to focus policy. What can be done so that social policies will not be inconsistent with economic policies? Which groups of women will a certain social policy focus on at every stage so that it can address their issues and, at the same time, orient them toward participating in the sustainable development of the country? What can be done to encourage

disadvantaged women to make a contribution and, at the same time, to create more opportunities for other groups of women to work together and to participate in earning higher incomes for themselves and their families?

Answering these questions requires paying attention to the fact that women are not only the object of policy but are also a part of the social labor force, which is often the subject of the policy-making process. Consequently, studying women and gender issues will provide the scientific ground for renovating social policies.

3. Content of Social Policies

Social policies on women so far have been covering various aspects of the concern about content, but they have mainly concentrated on the three following goals:

- Encouraging and motivating women to participate in production activities;
- Creating conditions for women to improve their abilities and skills;
- Strengthening women's participation in management work and leadership.

These social policy objectives have been implemented at different stages and with different degrees of scope. For all three stages, going back to the establishment of the DRV, these three goals have been included in social policies to different degrees.

A great number of policy documents relating to women were concentrated on the first objective, making up 80% of the total number of policies on women. The rest were concentrated on the two latter objectives, with the strengthening of women's capacity making up 12% and women's participation in management work,

8% (Pham Thi Thu et. al., 1993). These rates indicate a significant difference in the degree of concern shown by policy makers regarding different policy issues and objectives. This also reveals the fact that social policies, even now, are still inclined toward motivating the labor force rather than training, retraining and improving the knowledge of women. Let's take a closer look at several groups of policies.

To create conditions for women to participate in production activities, state policies have concentrated on two main areas: material schemes and working conditions, or in one word: labor security. Specifically, these policies have been aimed at the following goals:

- Creating material schemes to maintain the incomes of the female work force in order to avoid any disturbances or discontinuity. These schemes include support and allowances for a childbearing and sick leave, breast-feeding breaks, less and easier work during pregnancy, etc.
- Building and organizing a network of kindergartens, preschools at work places to free working mothers from having to take care of their children;
- Providing adequate working conditions and environment for women. For example, prohibiting the use of female workers in dangerous jobs and places and preventing mothers of small babies from being forced to work a third shift, assigning pregnant workers to easier tasks, and reducing the public work load for female workers.

This scheme has been in place for a relatively long time, namely since the 1960s and 1970s. Since the 1980s, this scheme has been maintained mainly in the non-productive sector due to the decrease in the budget allocation, on the one hand, and, on the other

hand, because businesses now have to apply self-accounting methods that must take into account every kind of cost. The real value of the scheme has also decreased due to inflation and increases in the prices of related goods and services.

Security policies for female workers, as a national policies, have not only been applied in Vietnam but in many countries around the world. Maternity allowances, as a component of social policies, has been implemented differently from country to country. The law often provides the duration of maternity leave. It varies between two weeks in several Asian countries and two years in several Nordic countries. The average duration applied in many countries is 12 weeks. Allowances also vary from country to country: from 50% to 100% of monthly wage/salary for one month to 12 months. This fact shows that labor security is a policy that is emphasized in many countries.

The problem for Vietnam at present is how to enforce regulations approved by the National Assembly Labor Code providing material schemes not only for female state workers and employees but also for all those who are working in non-state sectors. The experiences of other countries show that there may be two possible solutions. First, the state may regulate the source of funds set aside for female worker's allowances, including maternity programs, and second, they may maintain a system of labor monitoring and inspection to disclose and handle offences. Let's take China as an example. Recently, a so-called Independent Childbearing Support Fund has been established. This fund is centrally regulated and made up of the contributions of labor employers. Allowances given to female workers and employees are separate from the enterprise and organizations. To monitor this fund, a team of labor inspectors is used.

The effectiveness of policy depends on the performance of the monitoring and inspection mechanism, focused mainly on the expenditure of wages and salary, transport means, etc. The formation of the kind of labor inspection team takes time. We know that the existing labor inspection program is still weak and insufficient in Vietnam. For example, in Hanoi at present, there are 805 state-owned enterprises and 1,474 non-state enterprises employing about 300,000 workers altogether, but the labor inspection teams have only 8 people (My Hang, 1996).

Providing opportunities for women to improve their knowledge and skill through strengthening training, retraining and employment activities represents one of major concerns of the state and government for years. The main idea here is to strengthen training, organize and employ cadres and retrain them for better performance, as emphasized in Resolution 31/CP of the Council of the Government, dated September 8, 1967 (Degree 31/CP, March 8, 1967).

The state has made decisions regarding the recruitment of female graduates from both foreign and domestic universities and from vocational training schools and centers. The targets for female worker and employee recruitment have been applied in many economic sectors. Specific jobs have been defined especially for and decisively arranged for women such as typing, secretarial work, accounting, statistics and other services (Decree 31/CP, March 8, 1967).

Training, placement and employment policies regarding female workers have been made in the context in which the state is simultaneously the employer, central regulator and manager of all of the social human resources in the economy. The main measures undertaken were aimed at developing and allocating directive targets based on the demand for labor, including female labor, for

every period of time and for every sector. These policy measures were made in the condition where labor mobility tended to be "in-out", that is, from the non-state sector into the state sector, and top-down, from the central down to the grassroots level, centrally and uniformly regulated and managed by the state. The result obtained thanks to these measures was the rapid increase in the number of female workers and their improved professional levels in the state sector. In 1955, for instance, females made up 5% of the total state staff, and this rate reached 27% in 1965 and 42% in 1975.

This tendency provides a significant contribution to the formation of criteria for evaluating the social activism of women over a long period of time. This means that, to work for the state, one had to have an educational degree, improved professional skills and political knowledge. This aspect has had also impact on the formation of the model of the progressive woman, which several generations of women have been pursuing. These perceptions and positions, while they may be appropriate for a time, however, if mechanically applied to today's situation would lead to the following problems.

- The resulting education and training emphasized degrees too much and neglected work skills; training programs were inclined toward educating public servants but neglected self-employment and income generation opportunities. For instance, the retraining of female state workers and employees did not pay sufficient attention to meeting the new needs and changing situations.

- Insufficient attention has been paid to training and retraining professional skills for the mass of female workers. The eradication of illiteracy and compulsory primary education programs for adults indicates that literacy alone is not necessarily beneficial to rural women, especially poor

females, and hence, that may be why such programs were easily abandoned. What may be more important and realistic is linking literacy to some skill and capacity to do a certain job, which may help generate some short-term benefits and also nurse long-term ones.

- The training networks established by the state are mainly located in big cities and urban areas. As a result, poor women, especially married ones, hardly ever go these centers for training.
- Private training schools and centers are many in number but lack the necessary support from the government to focus on training necessary skills to targeted groups of women. These skills, such as in electronics, information sciences, management of small-scale businesses and business administration, may be necessary and important not only in the short run but over time. The current training schools and centers charge fees that are too high, which the majority of middle-income women cannot afford. And, in cases where the fees are acceptable, the quality is very poor. Here, government regulation and intervention and support can be improved by implementing specific policies on training.
- The last strategic point in state policy-making is increasing the scientific and technological contents of social labor. This means industrializing and modernizing all aspects of material production.

The above analysis indicates that, to varying extents, we have been maintaining old policies that might have been appropriate to the time before renovation, but at present there are increasing requirements for changes in training policies and the employment of female workers.

4. Policy-making Mechanisms

Policy-making mechanisms represent specific steps, from studying and analyzing to developing and approving as well as enforcing policies. Studying, doing surveys and identifying problems make up the first step in the policy-making process. It also sets the objective and scope based on the urgency and seriousness of the issue. The second step is policymaking. This step is often assigned to a particular agency. This work includes the preparing, writing, refining and improving a draft, conducting discussions, publicizing the draft, making corrections and additions, and then submitting the draft. Appraisal and approval will be done by related and authorized agencies at relevant levels and then implemented.

Social policies towards women have been made based on the perceptions of the Communist party, which realizes itself through policies. The perception and direction of a party policy about women's work, as stated in different orders, decrees, regulations and resolutions of the Politburo and the Central Committee of the party and the state has been reflected in schemes and policies aimed at institutionalizing the specific contents of particular perceptions of the party.

The policy making process is a long and time-consuming process. The orders promulgated by the party are based on overall assessment and suggestions about issues made by different sectors, levels, social organizations and agencies concerned with women. To set an issue on the policy agenda, different reports and ideas and the comments of various concerned agencies and organizations are necessary. These ideas and comments might be gathered, summarized and assessed by specialized agencies, which deal with the areas and aspects of the issue of concern.

The next stage is the process of instituting the regulation or a policy. Drafts of a policy are made, publicized, corrected, adjusted and balanced according to the different positions of related agencies. This stage may involve many individuals who have to work very hard for a period of two or three months.

Similarly, but several months or years later, there follows the passage of state, ministerial and sectorial regulations and policies. This concretizes and institutionalizes the orders and resolutions of the party. For example, at a meeting with the Prime Minister on January 22, 1995, the Chairwoman of the Vietnam Women's Union suggested to the government the implementation of resolution 04/NQ-BCT of the Politburo, dated July 12, 1993, on renovating and strengthening the motivation of women in the new, changing environment (the Office of Government, 1995). This proposal was worked out 18 months after the enforcement of the Politburo resolution.

The present policy-making process takes so long that it clearly does not meet the diverse requirements and the changing role of women in the new environment of overall renovation. The long delay in making a policy is hardly adapted to the very fast changes in the economic and social situation today.

There are often a number of agencies and organizations involved in the policy-making process. A policy on women is often related to different ministries and agencies. The co-ordinating agencies and organizations sometimes face difficulties in the way they raise and judge issues. Hence, discussions tend to take time and they are hardly able to reach an agreement. In the case of a disagreement, some compromise may be reached so that a policy can be adopted and enforced. This fact makes the concretization and implementation of policies, in practice, very difficult.

Another important factor is that the orders and resolutions of the party often set big targets even though the possibilities and resources for their implementation are limited. At present, this may lead to two different points of view. Policy makers, on the one hand, may feel satisfied and consider the making of a policy as the successful fulfilment of a duty. Managers monitoring the implementation of a policy often lack faith in the feasibility of a policy and neglect to search for potentials and resources (both financial and human aspects) for implementing that policy. As a result, many policies may be made and these policies may be good ones, but the possibilities of institutionalizing and implementing them may be very limited.

Thus, not all of the contents of party orders and resolutions on women contained in policies have been institutionalized. Not all the policies of the state have been ensured financially, as well as the other conditions necessary for implementation. This requires the policy-making process to be done in a systematic, consistent, and timely way, because only a necessary policy, which has taken into account the possibilities for being put into action, would bring about benefits for women in the transitional period.

In short, three problems must be solved adequately to streamline the policy-making process. They include:

- Legalizing the policy-making process. This means identifying the deciding agency, the time allowed for drafting a document, and giving the responsibility for implementation to the agencies and levels periodically and in written form.

- Adequate decentralization. Provinces and localities should work out policies on women in their jurisdiction and so that they can meet the general requirements, and, at the same time,

make use of the initiatives of grassroots organizations and agencies.

- Rational empowerment. Localities should make policies toward their women to meet general principles and, at the same time, take the initiatives from grassroots institutions.

5. Policy Implementation Mechanism

The implementation of a social policy on women is understood as the duty and task of the party and people. State decrees, orders and regulations shall identify clearly who is responsible for what at various levels. This practice shows that a social policy can only be put into action when it is well understood and gains the full and active participation of all sectors, agencies and levels as well as the participation of every citizen, regardless of sex and gender.

However, recent experience indicates that administrations, governments and party organizations at different levels have assigned social policies on women to women. They might be assigned to Women's Work Units if the policies are related generally to women; they might be assigned to the Women's Unions if the policies are to address female state workers and employees. This kind of decentralization seems to be appropriate at first glance. In fact, at places, this has lead to the situation in which women must implement policies about women. Administrative levels and party organizations serve only to transmit to women the decisions relating to women themselves, and other responsible agencies and individuals do not pay sufficient attention to such policies.

At the same time, women's unions at all levels and women's work units, especially at the grassroots (commune, villages and enterprise) levels have too much work to do with inadequate resources. It usually happens that one union of one unit has to

exercise control, monitor work and directly give instruction on policy implementation and, at the same time, motivate and persuade administrative levels and party organizations to support the implementation of social policies on women.

The supervision part over, the tasks of gaining information and identifying problems emerging in the process of implementation have also been given to female individuals in leadership positions (in the case in which there are female members in administrative roles), or to a relevant women's work unit. Women's unions or women's work units often make periodic and urgent reports on the practical implementation of policies relating to women after some consultation with the head(s) of the party or administration. The heads of organizations and agencies at local levels often know very little or have very general information about the situation of female labor and their needs and difficulties.

Another important point is that policies directly related to women are often fragmented and separated by sector, area, and field, while the question of co-ordinating and monitoring is rarely raised, or if is, the attention is often insufficient. The following sectors and ministries relate directly to women: the Ministries of Health Care, Population and Family Planning; Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs; Protection of Pioneers; and Education and Training. In addition to these, other ministries are also related to them, such as the Ministry of Planning and Investment and the Ministry of Finance. How can the functions and activities of these agencies and sectors be co-ordinated at different levels? The National Commission for the Progress of Women has been making efforts to undertake co-ordinating functions; however, due to the lack of financial and human resources it faces many difficulties.

Other problems include the fact that the successful implementation of policies on women is sometimes dependent only on the ideas of higher-ranking leaders. Ideas, suggestions and solutions from the lower levels and localities are often not considered by ministries and high-ranking agencies. Those officials who are not sensitive to issues emerging from the lower levels normally lack trust in women, hence, they do not encourage and make enough use of their own initiatives and efforts.

The implementation of policies on women has been lacking state-supported regulations, systems and schemes for controlling and monitoring. In fact, some party organizations "forgot" the existing order of the party on women's work and in 1993, they ignored this order when assessing Order 44-CT/TW (1984) regarding several other urgent issues in women's work.

The reasons for the above situation are numerous. However, first of all, there is the lack of a perception and understanding on the part of officials and party members about the responsibilities of the party and society regarding the implementation of social policies on women

For women, the problem is not limited to improvement, simply understood by officials as manpower development for sustainable socio-economic development and effectiveness.

Other reasons stem from the lack of the concern in the interests of people and an inability to connect with them, especially women, a tendency demonstrated by several government officials and party members. Some of them are sensitive and enthusiastic in implementing top-down ideas, especially in the above-mentioned ministries. However, they are relatively conservative in listening to

and accepting the ideas and initiatives of female subordinates at the grassroots level.

Additionally, women often feel inferior about their knowledge levels and lack the ability to express their ideas and convince others to defend their points.

The participation of women's unions at different levels in policy making, monitoring and supervising the implementation of policies is facing many difficulties as local governments and authorities are not paying attention to their interests and are not listening to women. Women's level of knowledge and understanding, especially at the grassroots level, is low and limited.

In short, policies on women are confronting the urgent requirements of economic renovation. The trends of Doi Moi as well as the achievements already obtained in the social and economic field point out that social policies on women need to be improved in both objective and content. At the same time the mechanism for building and designing a policy and implementing it also needs to be improved. The method of identifying the object should be improved to be sensitive to vulnerable groups in the market mechanism. On the policy side, there should be a focus on measures to strengthen the capacity of women, and policy-making should be accurate and timely. The implementation, including the tasks of monitoring and supervision, should be done regularly with the full responsibility and understanding of the need for the progress of women being demonstrated by party members in various areas, sectors and levels.

CHAPTER 9

MEETING GENDER NEEDS, IMPROVING SOCIAL POLICIES TO THE LEVEL OF ECONOMIC RENOVATION

1. The Stages of Policy Development

Every policy is made in a specific context and at a certain time. Hence, a policy and its features can only be understood by examining them in particular and relevant economic contexts. Every stage of the development and construction of the country requires the working out of specific important political and socio-economic targets.

Social policies relating to women in our country have clearly reflected the social demands placed on women as well as their own needs during every period of development. During the war, for example, social policies often tended to be concerned with the mobilization of all resources for the liberalization of the country. During peacetime, on the other hand, the demand for the development of human resources for the advancement of the

country and society becomes more important. Social policies attempted to shift the center to protect the interests of women and improve their physical and moral lives to support sustainable development, social justice and civilization.

Along with the endless growth, construction and defence of the country, social policies have tended to change and evolve. From the most important political and socio-economic targets set for the whole period, the history of social policies on women can be divided into the following stages:

The 1945-1960 period is characterised by the main objective of the construction and defence of the people's government and the implementation of socialist reforms in the North. This period represents the initial stage of forming policies for women and female workers in the North.

The 1961-1975 period is characterized by the construction of socialism in the North and the fight for the reunification of the country. Social policies during this period were then aimed at encouraging, motivating and exploiting as much as possible human and non-human resources for the front. This was done especially to create conditions for women to participate and improve their roles in all social activities.

The 1976-1988 period is characterised by the unification of the country and the building up of the centrally planned model of management in the entire country. Social policies on women started to reveal a conflict between the objective and its implementation possibilities.

The period beginning in 1989 and continuing into the present is characterized by the shift to a market mechanism oriented toward socialism. Social policies relating to women during

this period have been undergoing major changes and adjustments according to the new level of requirements and targets.

The political tasks and socio-economic conditions relevant to every period have had decisive effects on the contents and features of policies on women. This point can be seen clearly through the number of and types of legal documents and regulations promulgated for every period of time.

There have been 19 resolutions, decisions and decrees promulgated by the state regarding women. Among these documents, many have had great significance, such as the Resolution of the Government Council (31/CP dated March 8, 1967) on strengthening the female labor force in the state agencies and state-owned enterprises (SOEs), The Resolution of the Council of Ministers (176-a/HDBT dated December 24, 1984) on strengthening the role and capacity of women in the construction and defence of the socialist country. In addition, 26 other policy documents have been made on general issues, including specific provisions also relating to women, such as the Labour Code (1947 and 1994), the Ordinance on Public Labour (1988), and the Law on Marriage and Family (1986).

Major party documents on women and female cadres include Resolution 153-NQ/TW dated January 10, 1967 of the Central Committee of the party, Resolution 04-NQ/TW dated July 12, 1993 of the Politburo, Order 44-CT/TW of June 1984, and Order 37-CT/TW of May 1994 of the Central Committee of the Party.

During the periods listed above, the number of policy documents relating to women's issues made during different periods has been unequal (Table 9.1).

Most policy documents were made in the 1961-1975 period and very few were made in 1945-1960. The number of policies relating to women increased by the late 1970s and then decreased (Figure 9.1).

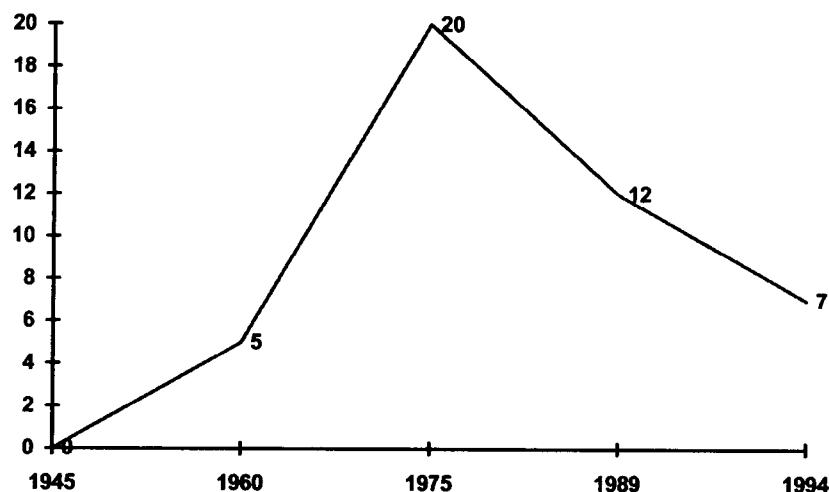
Table 9.1. The Number of Policy Documents on Women and those with Inclusions on Women, period of 1945-70

Period	Policies toward women	Policies with provisions about women	Total
1945-60	0	5	5
1960-75	14	6	20
1976-88	5	7	12
1989-96	2	5	7
Total	21	23	44

Source: *Nguyen Thi Thu and et al. Documents providing scheme and policies on women, family and children, 1993.*

These policy documents did not cover everything regarding the rights and benefits women should enjoy at every period of time. The type and contents of these policies, however, indicate how issues of women have caught the attention and raised the concern of policy makers in every period. This point, which will be examined later, depends on various factors, of which the most important is the public and social recognition of the role of women and their ability of to make contributions to the implementation of the political and socio-economic targets of the country in every stage of development.

Figure 9.1. The Number of Policy Documents on Women, 1945- 1994



2. The Characteristics of Policies

Major Features of Policies up to 1975

Period 1945-1960. What was noteworthy during this period was the way the first People's Democratic State in Asia institutionalized progressive positions on gender equality and included them in specific policies. This was a very important stage in making policies in the sense that it laid down the long-term foundation for policies of the future.

The national economy of Vietnam had other economic actors and labour employers existing side-by-side with the state sector. The co-existence of various forms of ownership and old and backward customs irrevocably affected different concepts and points of view on the equality issue. In that context, making state policies that were acceptable and effective not only in the state

sector but also in other sectors, including the private one, was an important concern.

Experience shows that, first of all, social policies during this period were made gradually and selectively. Second, legal documents tended to employ basic principles on gender equality to gain the support of both men and women. The Labour Code enforced by Decree 29/SL of the President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) dated March 12, 1947, provides an excellent example of this.

In the Labour Code, the basic principle of labor equality and equal pay for men and women was institutionalised specifically in article 57 of that law. It says that any female citizen who does the same work as a man should be paid the same wage and salary as the man. In the political context of the 1940s, this article reflected a progressive and new perception quite different from the common one prevailing at that time regarding the value of and the relationship between female and male labour.

However, the implementation of the law in fact faced difficulties in control and monitoring, especially at the grassroots level, namely in private productive units which made up the majority of enterprises at that time. This is probably why there was no mention of payment provision in the section about fines for breaking the law. Although unequal pay for both male and female workers doing similar jobs would be considered an act of breaking the law, nevertheless, as the law did not provide fines and sanctions, owners of businesses were not fined or taken to court.

A similar situation arose regarding the provision of female labour protection. For instance, according to the law, a female worker would have a maximum 12-week leave after giving birth to a baby, the employer was not supposed to terminate the labour

contract, and she was supposed to be paid half of her wages for the first eight weeks, plus additional allowances (Articles 31 and 12 of the Labour Code); Where there were more than 100 women working, the employer was to establish a kindergarten (Article 123). Again, there were no provisions for breaking the law. However, there were rigid provisions on offences, fines and sanctions, such as using female labour for night shifts or for doing dangerous, underground or mining jobs, and for cases in which employers did not arrange a place where female workers could breast feed their children (Articles 175 and 176).

What is noteworthy is not only the concrete content of provisions but also the way that the principle of gender equality was institutionalized. Step by step, the identification of different ways of adjusting the contents and the flexible measures used to enforce the policies provided an effective way to influence the behaviour of the subjects of a certain policy. This represents the basic method of making policies at present.

This method also focused on the selection of inclusions for forcing measures. Normally, what is considered most important for the policy subject would gain the most attention of the policy makers and, hence, would be specified in a way that would be most effective, and the most serious fines and sanctions would be provided regarding offences. However, the 1947 Labour Code did not follow this mode of thinking. In practice, the ability to monitor the implementation of different provisions was prioritized first and, hence, the enforcement of measures would be examined legally and included.

This means that the law only specified narrow provisions on what could be monitored and administered by lawmakers. For

instance, the article on equal payment for male and female workers may be the most important for female workers or at least as important as providing a place to breast feed. In the absence of monitoring measures regarding the enforcement of particular provisions on wage and salary, there was no ability to make and enforce provisions on offences.

The way in which provisions on female labour were made in the 1947 Labour Code shows the feasibility of that legal document. Policy making must, first of all, be based on the possibility of measuring, monitoring and evaluating what would be put into action, not be based on the subjective desires or wishes of law makers or law subjects.

From the methodology point of view, two important lessons may be drawn from the 1947 Labour Code. First, provisions can be made with different degrees of enforcement measures within one legal document. Compulsory provisions can be accompanied with guiding ones. This is dependent on the diversity of the law subjects and those who are to implement that law.

Second, a clear identification of the degree of enforcing measures should be based on the ability to monitor the implementation of every provision. This method of making a law would help improve the effect and implication of policy for women as its subjects. For any policy, particularly those concerning women, a policy including minimum rules that can be concretized and clarified in detail, as well as implemented, would bring about more benefits and effects than those which set high requirements that cannot be enforced.

The 1961-1975 period. Beside the great number of policies promulgated during this period, this period is also characterised by the detail and conformity of policies and provisions made for

women. The main objective of policies worked out during this period was to motivate women to participate in social and economic activities to serve the task of fighting American imperialism and to construct socialism in the country. To do this, policies during this time were made to strengthen the female labour force in state agencies, organizations and enterprises and to implement campaigns and contests to encourage women to excel in both the home and the workplace.

Resolution 31/CP of the Council of the Government, dated March 8, 1967, provides an important example of how the government institutionalized different policy objectives regarding women. In this resolution, the state, for the first time, raised the question of how to quickly strengthen the female labour force and set quotas for the number of women to be recruited into state institutions and enterprises. The resolution stated: "From now to the end of 1968, the percentage of female employees and workers in the state sector must make up 35% or above of the total number of staff..." This was a high target for two years (1967-1968), because only 31% was obtained by the end of 1966. To concretize this target for every sector, industry and field, the Resolution further stated: "Education, health care, light industry, trading, etc. have to increase their female staff from 50% to 70% or even higher... Other occupations and jobs, such as secretarial work, typing, telephone services, accounting, statistical services, reception work, etc. should be definitively developed for women." This might have been the root of the feminization of some of the fields and sectors mentioned above.

Along with absorbing women into the state sector, policies made during this period paid much attention to providing better conditions for women to participate in production. For example, the expansion of the network of kindergartens and pre-schools and

arrangements for children to go to rural areas during the war, as well as the establishment of common dining halls for staff, were aimed at this target. New recruitment policies, on-the-job training, and the promotion and addition of female members to the party made a significant contribution to quickly increasing the abilities of women. A question raised here is: "why did the policies made in the 1961-1975 period pay such great attention to women?" (E.g. Articles 175 and 176)

First and most importantly, this is due to the perception of the top leaders and policy makers of the role of women in the implementation of political objectives of the party and government during this period. For example, Resolution 31/CP of the government council stated that "...the further strengthening of the female labour force has political and economic significance and, at the same time, represents an urgent task...to meet the requirements of promoting production and struggle during wartime to rescue the country at the present time..."

The second reason that could be mentioned here is the political, social and economic situation specific to this period. The task of rescuing the country created urgent requirements for mobilizing human and non-human resources for the front. In fact, all healthy, able people were chosen from among cadres, staff and party members from all parts and corners of the North and sent to the front as an important support to the South. An increasing number of male soldiers and cadres sent to the front to serve in the army resulted in the serious shortage of and gender imbalance in the work force in the national economy, in state institutions and enterprises, as well as in all agricultural co-operatives. Facing that situation, the only solution to the problem was to institute an appropriate macro policy on women to motivate and create conditions for women to lessen the burden of work on the home front.

An analysis of policies on women shows a clear distinction between the perception and urgency of the reality. Real life often has an effect on perception and, in turn, perception plays a decisive role in the decisions and actions of policy makers. However, this does not mean that perception is always parallel with the reality and, in particular, leaders and managers do not always have the correct and timely perception and recognition of the urgency of real life situations. This point has been seen clearly in the perception of leaders regarding the everyday lives of women.

The importance of having women share and shoulder state work is not always reflected in the forms and degrees of urgency, as can be easily recognized and perceived during war time. That is why, outside of the war context, a full perception of the role of women and the conditions created for them seem to confront more difficulties. During peacetime, issues relating to women should be looked at and dealt with in a different way. It requires deeper, further-reaching and broader policy views, beyond the limits of the short-term or calculations of their direct effectiveness during wartime.

Adjustments of Social Policies on Women after 1975

The period 1976-1988. Policies on women made in the 1976-1988 period were diverse in form and content. These policies are characterised by great and important efforts to improve the rights and interests of women. These efforts were reflected in both the contents and prevalence of policies. The common spirit of these policies was based on what had been achieved during the previous era, and additions and adjustments were made in order to make the policies and schemes more beneficial to women. This was clearly reflected in the policy that provides maternity leave for women

working for the state. It increased paid leave from 60 days in 1948 to 75 days in 1983 and 180 days in 1985.

Labour division within the family was also included as a provision regulated by law. The Law on Marriage and Family of 1986 emphasizes that "The husband has a duty to create conditions for the wife to properly fulfil the role of mother."

A general characteristic of the 1976-1988 social policies on women that can be seen is the confirmation of the advantages of socialism. Social progress was reflected by making policies aimed at improving benefits for women and strengthening the management and administrative role of the agencies representing the interests of women.

After the success of the struggle for the independence of the country, the victory more or less had an effect on policy. The method commonly used to emphasize the advantages of the regime during this period was to strengthen the provision of special treatment for people, including women. This method was also considered a means of satisfying the desires of those who had made significant contributions to the construction and defence of the socialist country.

During the same period, particularly during the second half of the 1980s, the socio-economic crisis had an important impact on the implementation of different policies. Policy adjustments to ensure special treatments and permanent jobs to people became popular. Efforts were made to ensure the meeting of the basic needs of these people through providing different types of cash support that was regularly adjusted and increased. For example, childbirth and health allowances for both mother and child and money for purchasing things for the child were institutionalized.

Price increases during this period, however, reduced the value and significance of certain policy efforts and schemes, as well as hindered their adjustment. One of the conflicts around policy-making at this stage was the creation of a vicious circle: adjustment led to increased prices that led to other adjustments to ensure a relative level of support. Therefore, the real value of policies decreased based on the number of adjustments. This is only one aspect of the conflicts between the need and the capacity of social policies in a changing context.

Difficulties in making and implementing policies, in general, and social policies towards women, in particular, during 1976-1988 stemmed from other factors as well. First, the number of beneficiaries increased very fast. Second, the state sector started to expand in the whole country. As a result, the total number of employees and workers in state-owned enterprises increased from 519,200 in the previous period to 843,900 persons, making up 62% of the total labor force for the period 1976-1988, excluding those working in the non-productive sphere.

To summarize, policy making and implementation from 1976-1988 showed signs of demand for significant policy adjustments. However, partial adjustments made in the old policy-making framework did not bring about the desired results, which created the need for bigger and more radical adjustments based on an analysis of the current socio-economic changes.

3. Gender Equality and the Challenges of Social-Economic Reform

Facing big changes taking place in socio-economic areas, social policies on women have been improved to meet the requirements of gender equality in the new environment.

As analyzed above, since 1989 the government has made several new policy documents, two of which are concerned with women and another five having provisions relating to women's issues, such as the Ordinance on Labor Protection, dated September 19, 1991, and the Labor Code approved by National Assembly on June 23, 1994.

It is noteworthy that the participation of women's unions in state management and monitoring activities was institutionalized during this period. Decision 163/HDBT of October 1988 by the Council of Ministers outlines the responsibilities of different administrative levels in promoting women's unions at different levels and their participation in state management work.

The number of policy documents has been reduced compared to the previous period. This shows that upon entering the period of socio-economic renovation, even though significant changes had occurred and a series of economic policies had been newly developed and amended, there have not been relevant changes in policy on women or appropriate efforts made to build up and renovate social policies for women. Social policies for women at this time were still those made before 1989.

There have been very few changes in policy making for women since 1989. They mainly emphasized meeting the specific needs of women, that is, maternity schemes. As in the past, these policies were aimed at female state employees and workers as the subjects of policies.

The period from 1989 up to now, however, has witnessed profound changes in socio-economic life. There have been basic changes in different economic policies. The amended Constitution of Vietnam (1992), the Land Law, the Labor Code and The Law on Promotion of Domestic Investments have been creating a more

open, fair and legal environment for economic and business activities. These changes have had different and important effects on the opportunities and treatment of different groups of the population. The uniformity and consistency of policies, in this context, require relevant changes in social policies towards women. First of all, these changes should be made in perception and then in the content and inclusion of policies in order to adapt to the changing environment resulting from changes in economic policies first of all.

A new point in developing policies on women is the hot discussion around adjustments being made in maternity schemes for women working for the state. There have even been conflicting points of view concerning this issue among policy makers, both female and male, on the 180 days of paid leave for working females.

These discussions show that making social policy for women during this period is facing new problems and conflicts different from the previous periods. The contents of discussion also reflect differences in perception and approaches to schemes for working females, a problem that was very seldom encountered before. In the end, the duration of leave for giving birth was adjusted from 180 to 120 days for females working in productive and business areas. This is a sign of decreasing support for women. This adjustment can be seen as an example of the tendency to reduce expenditures for social activities in the changing economy.

The reduction in social expenditures is continuing to increase. This may be the other big challenge to policy makers, in general, and to social policies for women, in particular. It is not easy to decide how to reduce special treatments for women in the new regime. In documents, therefore, existing schemes tend to be

maintained but provisions concerning them are less powerful. This is one of the reasons leading to the widening gap between the need for policies and possibility of implementing them, effects pushing policy implementers to extremes.

An analysis of policies by periods shows that, like other general policies, social policies for women bring about desired results when they are oriented and aimed at addressing the appropriate issues of a specific stage and time. For this, the important thing is to identify the key tasks and problems that a society intends to address and, hence, to make additions and amendments for a particular time period. This also means that social issues and problems and their degree and scope should be objectively identified and checked at every stage of development so that the appropriate measures and approaches are used to deal with them. To do this, there must be a systematic and historical approach to evaluating and making a policy for each stage. However, what is most important here is the full perception and understanding of the role of women in the implementation of socio-economic activities for that specific period, as well as their position in the development of the country.

In short, social policies on women are facing new challenges. How can the principle of gender equality be realized in the transition of the economy to a market system with a socialist orientation? What policy mechanism is required to continuously improve and effectively implement policies relating to women and gender? There may be a series of other questions regarding the responsibilities, power and functions of different levels, ranging from central to grassroots, as well as for individuals facing issues of women and gender.

A strict market mechanism itself will not bring equal benefit and gain for women who have been disadvantaged so far in education, training, skills and health compared to men. Favouring or realizing mechanically and subjectively the principle of equality, or applying egalitarianism, or so-called "levelling," has become inappropriate nowadays. Even an effort to employ this way of treating women would impede reform and undermine the socio-economic achievements already made. In this context, the end principle to address any problem that has arisen is to pay attention to real life. This means to summarize the reality of making and implementing policies into lessons, quickly identifying new elements and developing and behaving to fit the needs, wishes and abilities of the requirements of socio-economic renovation.

4. Analysis of the Impact of Socio-economic Policies on Women

The policy reforms that have been taking place, include, first of all, investment policies, long-term land use assignment policies to farmers, and policies relating to labor relations. One of the important features of economic policy is that it does not always identify the direct and specific subjects of a policy. Gender and women's issues have not been included due to the belief that economic policies apply generally to all people, both women and men. Besides, many policy makers think that women and gender issues are of a social nature, lying outside of the concern of policy. Data and information provided by Part II of this book argue how great and important the impact of economic policies has been on women, especially in related areas such as income, implementation, and credits. Analyzing the impact of several socio-economic policies from the point of view of women and gender has been based on the perception that any policy, in the end, aims to serve

people and satisfy the needs and desires of the people. The people policies never aim to form a general group, but, on the contrary, they have specifics and are characterized by gender, race, educational attainment and social status. A policy that can be quickly and effectively put into action would best meet the concrete and realistic needs of the group of subjects that it aims to serve. This explains why economic policies need to be concerned with social issues, including gender issues, and why every economic policy needs to carefully consider the possible impact it may have on both women and men.

Below are two examples of the impact a policy is having on women and men in reality. The first example refers to a general economic policy that does not specify its subjects and the second one refers to a policy that is specifically for women.

Land Policy

The Land Law approved by the National Assembly in 1993 has created a very important precondition for agricultural production and rural development at present. The law has broadened the rights of peasants and farming households regarding long-term land use, transfer and heritage, etc. The Land Law therefore was able to enter life very quickly and be welcomed by the mass of people.

It is hard to find any implication of discrimination against women or men in the document. Land rights are assigned to households and any family member, regardless of gender, who shall have the right to use a plot of land assigned to them by law. Thus, there would be no reason to argue that the law discriminates by gender, benefiting men or women more.

However, the enforcement of the law, in itself, does not ensure that women and men have equal rights in using a plot of land assigned to them.

It is worth mentioning two aspects of this issue as follows:

The Certificate (or Red Book) on Land Use Rights

According to the law, a certificate on land use rights is the only legally valid document on land use. This document is not only recognized and protected by the concerned state authorities, but can also be used as collateral for bank loans and credits as well as for other purposes requiring legal approval. This indicates the multi-faceted meaning of this legal document for land users.

The common practice is that the head of the household signs a land use certificate for a household. According to surveys, 76% of household heads are men in rural areas (the General Office of Statistics, 1994) and the land use rights are mainly given to men only. This is not yet even talking about gender equality. There are already conflicting land use assignments by labor and residency arising from using the name of one person on the land use rights certificate.

Obviously, there is no trouble when the family is at peace, with both husband and wife participate in making decisions relating to land. In practice, however, life is not always so simple and easy. A number of scandals and disputes on land use rights have occurred and the fact that the name of the wife is not on the land use document may lead to disadvantages for women in many cases.

When asked about this matter, land administrators do not deny the appropriateness of listing the names of both husband and wife on the document. However, they argue that adding the name of the husband (or the wife) on the document would take time and is not necessary or important!

The benefits women naturally have (but not a kind of favouring or special treatment) may be easily neglected as such due

to an insufficient understanding of the diverse impact a policy may cause.

The experiences of different countries show that women may be disadvantaged, as there is a lack of strictly legalized policies regarding their ownership over resources, such as land. If today policy makers understood as minor and unimportant a thing as writing the names of both husband and wife on the certificate, there would be fewer scandals and disputes relating to land issues happening in the future. More importantly, this would provide the legal basis for having access to land one of the most basic and effective productive resources, without discriminating against women.

Land Division. Land division is taking place in many localities with various problems and complexities arising relating to classifying, measuring, and arranging "lucky draws", which reveals several types of discrimination against poor rural and single women. The land they get is usually allocated in unwatered, distant areas and is has low fertility. Especially at places in the North, a number of peasants have been assigned with only a part of land they should have because of debts owed to agricultural co-operatives in the past. The rate of land confiscated has reached 44% of the total assigned land in Nǎm Ha, 40% in Hoa Binh and 35% in Ha Bac provinces. What causes the most concern is that many households who had to give land back to the commune administration are headed by women.

This indicates that the implementation of a policy, in fact, is not the same as what is provided on paper. Gender equality may be prevented due to various factors. Making economic policies, therefore, needs to be done with more understanding about the interests of women to minimize the shortcomings, limitations and

holes that may be abused and may impact the principle of gender equality.

The Labor Code

The labor code provides an example of a group of socio-economic policies, which have specific provisions relating to women. As stated before, this code has one chapter devoted to female workers, Chapter X, which can be called the female labor chapter, specifying concrete provisions relating to women. Formerly, many policy makers believed a separate chapter would provide more social justice for women compared to men. However, practice does not prove that.

A chapter of that code provides specific schemes for female workers. However, besides specific needs, women also have other needs as working people, just as men do. Meeting these needs can be done only through general provisions, taking into consideration the concrete conditions of women. This requires a proper understanding of gender in developing all other chapters, articles and provisions of the law. However, lawmakers may argue that having a separate chapter for working females is sufficient. The effects of other chapters, articles and provisions on female workers are numerous and diverse throughout all aspects of labor relations.

For example, article 28 of chapter IV on labor contracts provides that: "Verbal contracts shall be made on labor within a family." In practice, due to the lack of official contract documents, female laborers may suffer from disadvantages and are not protected by the law in the case of a dispute. At the same time, more than 90% of housework is done by women and the degree of female engagement in housework has been increasing annually. In this area, female labor may often be abused, and this is not yet even mentioning the phenomenon of the illegal trade in women, which

has not yet been acknowledged and dealt with in court. In China, about 3 million women are hired as maids every year. Evidence shows that many of women have been exploited, abused and badly treated. Allowing related parties to enter into a verbal contract on family labor arrangements may result in disputes in which female labor may not be protected by the law, as there is no legal ground for intervention.

This example is not the only one. It is important to note that it is not the consequence of the lack of concern or neglect of the interests of female workers, but of inappropriate methods. It is because all issues relating to women are not secured by the law as mentioned above.

The above two examples indicate that socio-economic policies should be made with a clear perception of the specific impact and consequences they would bring about for both women and men. The recognition and understanding of gender equality in the whole process of policy making, if included in the content of a policy, would allow the appropriate inclusion in different relevant chapters, sections and articles to better meet the needs and fulfil the desires of both women and men. For this, the network of rapport in different sectors and areas should be developed in a way that can provide necessary information and data on women and men to evaluate the situation from a gender point of view, in order to find adequate solutions. Principles of gender equality must be fully understood right from the beginning and kept in sight during the whole policy making, implementation and assessment process.

5. Improving Social Policies to the Level of Economic Renovation: Potentials and Challenges

The economic renovation-taking place in Vietnam in recent years has brought about impressive and surprising results. After ten

years of reform, Vietnam has moved from having an economy, which was in a serious social and economic crisis and stagnation to being a country with one of highest growth rates in the world (Table 9.2).

Table 9.2. National Income Growth Rates of Vietnam and Countries in the Region, %

Countries	1986-90	1991	1992	1993	1994	1991-94
Vietnam	5.6	6.0	8.6	8.1	8.8	7.9
NICS	8.8	7.3	5.3	6.2	6.3	6.3
ASEAN	7.8	6.3	5.8	6.5	7.1	6.4
China	7.6	7.5	12.6	10.0	10.0	10.0

Source: *ADB, The Development of Asia in 1993: Socio-economic Problems, Series 27-18, June of 1994, P.2-3. General Office of Statistics, 1994 Hanoi, 1995, p.73*

The achievements of economic renovation can be clearly seen through a comparison of economic indicators for different periods of time. The average annual national income increased 5.6% for 1986-1990 and continued to grow at increasing rates for 1991-1994. The development of agriculture has witnessed relatively stable growth, reaching 4% for the same period. Industrial production has maintained the rate of 10% annually. High inflation in the late 1980s has been curbed to a rate of less than 10% per year (Table 9.3).

Table 9.3. Several Economic Indicators, 1986-1998, %

	1986-90	1991	1992	1993	1994	1998
National income	5.6	6.0	8.6	8.1	8.8	5.8
Agricultural product	3.5	2.9	8.1	6.2	3.9	3.0
Industrial product	6.2	10.4	17.1	12.7	13.5	11.5
Service Sector	-	8.3	7.0	9.0	10.0	6.0
Price index	-	67.5	17.5	5.2	4.4	-

Source: General Office of Statistics, Statistical Data of 1976-1990, Hanoi, 1991 Statistic Yearbook. Hanoi, 1995.

The high growth rate of economic development is also cause for certain concerns. Along with the danger of being left behind in the economic situation, there are the germs of a depression in the potential for the sustainable development of the country. The rate of dropping-out children aged 6-11 decreased from 90% in 1980-1981 to 70% in 1986-1987; that of children aged 11-15 decreased from 60% to 54% respectively. The number of school children decreased by 7%, from 12.5% million pupils for 1987-1988 school year to 12.2 million for 1989-1990. For the 1990-1991 school year, the number of school children increased slightly, by 0.5%, but much slower than the growth rate of population, 2% per year. The number of school children was 12.8 million, increasing 4.4 % for the 1991-1992 school year, but mainly the decreases have been in the primary and lower secondary schools, which had 423,600 pupils for the 1986-1987 school year and 247,700 for 1991-1992 school year.

Regardless of the enforcement of policy on compulsory primary education, 7.5% of girls under 10-14 years of age do not attend schools, while for boys the percentage is 6.5%.

The health situation for women and children is another concern. The rate of malnourished children under one year of age is still high, 50%, among the highest of countries in the region. The rate of underweight children has stood at 45% for the whole 1986-1994 period. More than 50% of the populace are living under the poverty line, with a calorie intake of less than 2100 K calorie per day. Recently Vietnam has made great achievements in poverty reduction. As estimated by Vietnamese agencies, the economic poverty rate is 15.7% in 1999. The fact that domestic and international agencies provide various estimates of poverty rate means that the fight against hunger and poverty should be continued with strong commitment from the Government (Table 9.4).

Table 9.4. The Rate of Poverty in Vietnam Estimated by Various Agencies, (%)

Agencies	Hunger-Poverty	1992-1993	1997-1998
MOLISA	Hunger	5.0	2.0
	Poverty	30.0	15.7
World Bank	Poverty in Food	-	15.0
Statistical Office	-	24.9	-
World Bank	Poverty	58.1	37.4
UNDP	Human Poverty	-	28.7

Source: UNDP. Report of Situation in Vietnam: Looking toward the Future. Hanoi - 12/1999. P. 28.

The unemployment rate is still relatively high. The unofficial number is about 20%. The gap between rich and the poor is increasingly widening in both regional and gender terms.

Different reasons have been used to explain the slow improvement in the quality of life compared to economic growth. What is noteworthy is the investment policy of the government. Expenditures on education, health care and scientific research still makes up small and even decreasing portions of the government budget. The rate of investment made by the state in scientific research decreased from 1.02% in 1985 to 0.65% in 1992; in education this amount decreased from 3.01% to 2.7%; and in health care-from 3.09% to 2.44% (Table 9.5).

Table 9.5. Budget Expenditures in Science, Education and Health Care, 1985-1992

	1985	1989	1990	1991	1992
Total*, (Billion VND) of which:	2719.9	1919.8	2145.8	2383.0	3333.2
Science	27.8	20.7	30.7	24.8	21.7
Education	81.8	54.7	89.2	83.6	90.1
Health	84.0	37.3	62.9	67.4	81.4
Structure (%)					
Science	1.02	1.08	1.43	1.04	0.65
Education	3.01	2.85	4.16	3.51	2.70
Health	3.09	1.94	2.93	2.83	2.44

Source: General Statistical Office, Yearbook 1993, Hanoi, 1994

Note: * At constant price of 1989.

One again, data and evidence indicate that women's issues are related closely to socio-economic ones. Increasing the investment in scientific research, education and health care would provide more opportunities for training, taking care of the health for women and ensuring the future of workers. However, this would be limited to improving the status of women if efforts are limited to this area. Urgent matters of today, such as the employment and income of women, depend much on the major matters, such as the investment structure of the government budget for different areas. For example, this includes how a budget is divided between urban and rural infrastructure, delta and mountain, state and non-state sectors, etc. As mentioned above, this is because a greater number of women are concentrated in rural areas and are working in non-state sectors, and rural women have been provided with fewer opportunities than those in urban areas. These are economic issues that would result in positive results and effects on the position of women if they were to be considered from the point of view of social development. This is why; along with an analysis of social policies on women, an analysis of economic policies to identify their impact on women is very important. A comparison of the impact of policies on women and men would help managers and leaders to develop a comprehensive view of the positive effects of giving women access to policies.

A greater number of legal documents have been made about women and the family in the last 50 years. This indicates the great concern and attention of the Communist party to the state of women's work in order to protect their rights and interests. The Party has released 44 policy documents, orders, resolutions and decrees relating to women.

Given the progressive contents and nature of the constitution and specific policies as analyzed, Vietnam is among a group of

former socialist countries that early on raised and implemented principles of gender equality aimed at improving the position and situation of women. Sweden, as the most progressive one with the most favourable conditions for women, included an article on gender equality in their constitution in 1975. Other countries have not yet created provisions barring discrimination against women and gender inequality in their constitutions, such as Egypt, Uganda, Zambia, etc. Even in Thailand, the concept of discrimination has not been legally clarified and the creation of a law against gender discrimination is still under discussion.

Vietnam was the second country in the world, after Sweden, and the first one in Asia, to sign the International Order to fight all discriminatory behaviour against women (1980). It can be seen that the state of Vietnam highly appreciates the principles of equality and its female citizens. In this regard, Vietnamese women have been enjoying better and fuller gender equality compared to their counterparts in other countries.

In practice, it is necessary to note that what is specified and provided in the Constitution and laws becomes practically effective when it is concretized into by-laws. Regarding social policies, this includes the work of generalizing and summarizing to teach the lessons and experiences of implementing policies in order to discover shortcomings and make timely and adequate changes and adjustments. The main point here is that women's issues are of a social nature that link closely to economic ones and to the sustainable development of the country. Improving social policies to the level of economic renovation means continuing to create more opportunities and favourable conditions for every individual,

woman and man, to realize the right of pursuing happiness for their themselves, their families, and society as whole.

However, in the context of economic reform, social policies in general and policies about women in particular are slow to improve and change. The experiences of the past indicate that many social problems have not been radically addressed due to the lack of change in the design and implementation of policies. This is particularly true for policies on women. Renewals, additions and amendments to policies on women require, methodologically speaking, careful consideration of at least the following three concerns. One, correctly identifying the nature and characteristics of women's problems at the present time. Second, accelerating the control and monitoring of the implementation of women's policies. And third, making changes in how the agenda is set for policies on women, within the system of state policies. Below are the details of each of these concerns.

The first requirement raised nowadays is to identify the nature of women's problems in the changing environment, and hence, to direct the undertaking of specific and essential measures. The present economic situation is creating quite different requirements in comparison to the past, for example, in regard to the retirement age for women. In the past, every man or woman joining the social labor force was provided with a lifetime job, so the problem of job opportunities for women was basically addressed in that way. The main problem concerning women at that time was how to ensure that women made equal gains for equal work. During that period, the retirement age for women was 55 years and for men, 60. This means that the work duration required before being able to claim a pension was five years shorter for women than for men. In other

words, in order to enjoy a pension scheme at a similar level, for example 100% of salary and wages, a woman needed to work for 30 years consecutively while a man had to work for 35 years. This scheme allowed working women to benefit from social insurance scheme for retired people five years earlier, a method by which the preferential principle of labor gain distribution was exercised.

In the market economic mechanism, the government and state do not ensure jobs any longer. The demand for jobs is urgent for both women and men, but it is especially important for women. The creation of equal employment opportunities for them is a requirement of the society. In this context, maintaining the earlier retirement age for women would mean restricting their employment opportunities. Thus, the question of how to adjust policy accordingly becomes a pressing one. However, up to now, there has been no agreement among policy-makers on this matter. Many of them argue that it is necessary to maintain special treatment for women through the retirement age scheme. This shows that identifying the right problem for women, including all of its characteristics and the scale and scope of its reflection of life, at present would provide a key factor for renewing the design of and adjusting women's policies.

Another aspect needing consideration is that in shifting to a market economy, the state is no longer the only one implementing policies; now there are many other organizations involved in the policy implementation process. In the field of labor, for example, along with the state, private enterprises and joint ventures with foreign investors are now also labor employers. They also participate in the implementation of provisions regarding female workers, including provisions on employment, firing, training, salaries, and policies on pregnant workers and working mothers.

This reality has generated the need for strengthening the control and monitoring of the behavior of enterprises to see whether they are in compliance with provisions on female workers. In practice, many employers have been avoiding compliance or applying these provisions on woman workers in the wrong way. Without effective, adequate control or monitoring measures from various organizations, such as from the state, labor unions and female workers, and without appropriate measures to address breaches, policies would be limited to words rather than be fully realized. What is noteworthy is that, up to this point, this matter has not been received adequate attention and concern. Policy-makers and women's union leaders at different levels seem to focus more on policy development, neglecting the control and monitoring process necessary to implement the policies they have made.

A further issue is that, over time, policies on women have developed into specific provisions or additional sections attached to general policies, such as the chapter on female labor in the Labor Code. The integration of various concerns with women into general social and economic policies, directions and strategies or national development programs such as the National Employment Program or the National Poverty Alleviation Program has not attracted relevant concern. Ministries and local governments have not discussed the inclusion of gender issues in their state management work, while, as we have noted earlier, women's issues should be located in the center of the general interests and concerns of various institutions at all levels and in the whole society. In particular, women's policies need to be integrated into social and economic policies for every period of time, with specific and clearly defined objectives and measures included to guarantee the progress of women. In this respect, policies

on women can cope with the process of renewal and make contributions to the mobilization of potentials for this process, making the best use of the gains of Doi Moi.

Thus, renovating the methods of designing policies towards women should start from making additions and concretising perspectives on liberation by employing the concept of gender at the level of policy making and implementation. Male-female equality should be considered a long-term, strategic task and a necessary task of urgent nature in the entire society at present.

CONCLUSION

Vietnamese women, in every work position and in every social condition, have been making significant contributions to increasing and enlarging social and economic achievements, helping changes in the society to occur in a more beneficial way. Along with men, women in our country have been entering into a period of industrialization and modernization of the nation with the pride of generations behind them and the potentials of Vietnamese women supporting them.

However, at the same time, issues are being raised for women in general and for every woman in particular concerning the gap between women's abilities and requirements, their responsibility and power, their ability to contribute and make gains, and their family work and social activities.

Women's issues are not theirs alone, but neither do they belong to all people. These problems are specific to every family, community, and administration at any level, which are concerned with the income, employment, working conditions, health status and education of women. An essential matter for every manager and state official is to take responsibility for and be aware of how to improve the status and position of women in social and economic management and administration. Women's issues are clear for any husband or father who is taking care of the raising and education of children in urban as well as rural areas. Women's issues are timely, and should be a strategy for every country leader sensitive to gender justice and social equality.

That is why discovering and correctly addressing women's and gender issues, which is the task of every individual, has a major theoretical and practical significance for social and economic Doi Moi and development of our country.

To meet these objective needs, women's studies has been under formation and has been developing into a new scientific research area concerned with the seemingly old, day-to-day and familiar issues of women in the society.

Unlike old perspectives and theories, however, women's studies researches what has recently been changing in the behavior, status, position, and gender roles of the two sexes in social life, from the point of view of women, in order to benefit the two sexes. The scientific conclusions drawn from initial studies on women, as presented in this book, deserve more attention and discussion. For example, the market mechanism now developing does not benefit women themselves, in terms of creating equality with men in

earning and working, but, on the contrary, has lessened women's job opportunities. Those jobs they are now taking are require fewer skills, hence, they have been left behind in terms of professional levels. The results of studies also indicate that the regulatory role of the government and state through social and economic policies should be more able to ensure male-female equality and gender justice. Therefore, one of basic suggestions here is to create more socially and economically effective development policies and planning, if policies are to take into account how to meet the needs of both women and men.

In 1995, the GDP grew 9.5% over figures from 1994. Industrial production increased by 14% and total foodstuff production reached 27 million tons – an increase of one million compared to 1994 and 34 million ton in 1999. The living standard in both rural and urban areas are being improved, the rate of hunger-poverty reduces to 2.4 million households accounting for 15.7%, and 58/61 provinces/cities are considered to meet standards of illiteracy elimination and complete compulsory primary education. Although there has been some reduction in GDP growth in last years, the fundamental achievements of the economic renewal are being maintained and will continue to develop.

The 8th Communist Party Congress of Vietnam, held in July 1996, was successful in laying down strategies for further developing and motivating economic renovation (Doi Moi). The national action plan for the progress of Vietnamese women has been completed at the national level and is under detailed preparation at the ministerial and provincial levels. The 8th Women's Congress made a number of strategic action plans for the

women's movement. This all confirms the correct way and direction the Party has chosen, the effective managing role of the state, and the dynamic and active participation and potential of women in various sectors and at different levels. This will open up new opportunities for successfully addressing issues of women, gender and development in Vietnam.

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WOMEN AND ĐỔI MỚI IN VIETNAM

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TRAN THI VAN ANH
LENGOCHUNG

Women and đổi mới in Vietnam

Exploring women's issues in Vietnam during the transition, this book focuses on the effects of economic reform on women and how gender plays an important role in designing development policies in Vietnam today.

Analyzing the changes in women's work, education and health care, the authors note that despite significant improvements in women's life, gender inequality appears to be growing. Women appear to have less access to good job as well as to education and health services. The participation of women in decision making decreased at all levels. Highlighting the features of policy making processes, the authors see the need of new policy approaches toward women in transition.

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