

Women and doi moi

‘..... 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.’ p 15

‘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.’ p 15

‘..... 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.’ p 16

‘In the long run, however, women’s studies, as an independent study, need to be specialized. That is, 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.’ p 17

‘..... 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.’ p 22

‘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?’ p 23

“Social justice” requires the ability to address contradictions between the needs of different classes , groups and individuals and the ability of the society to meet those needs.’ p 23

‘.... 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.’ pp 24-25

‘..... [statistics] implies that the new emerging market economy in Vietnam may bring about new issues and problems with gender development to be solved.’ p 26

‘.... Most of women’s economic activities have been taking place in the informal sector, which is not fully covered by official statistics.’ p 33

‘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.’ p 51

‘..... 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.’ p 64

‘..... 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 growth-directed model emphasized measures to accelerate the growth rate of the national economy at any price.

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 *Adverse realities, gender hierarchy in development discourse*, 1994) p 69

‘The social and economic reform period in Vietnam (Doi Moi) has been creating great opportunities for changing perceptions and moving from WID [Women in Development] to GAD [Gender and Development]. 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.’ p 82

‘..... 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.’ p 92

‘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..... 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.’ p 94

‘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.’ p 98

‘....78% of working age labourers are found at present in rural areas, and 60% of these are women.’ pp 98-99

‘Since 1991, there have been about a 70% worker redundancy rate in the state sector, with many coming back to rural areas and the agricultural sector, and women make up the majority as their job opportunities in cities and towns are becoming rarer than men’s.’ p 99

‘..... as they are less competitive under the market economy, businesses located in rural areas have fallen into marginal and bankruptcy situations.’ p 100

‘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. 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.’ pp 100-101

‘The lack of employment and low wages, especially in comparison with urban areas, results in increased rural-urban labour mobility to seek jobs.’ p 101

‘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.’ p 102

‘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 1995 to 1990. (General Statistical Office, *Agriculture of Vietnam, 1945-1995*, Hanoi, 1995) p 103

‘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. (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 demand for the development of industry.’ p 105

‘.... 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 the nature of women’s labour in rural areas have not been improved accordingly to support them.’ p 108

‘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%.’ p 109

‘.... 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.’ pp 109-110

‘..... 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..... 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 unemployment in cities is 7-8% but in fact it must be higher, has been 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.’ p 113

‘..... 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 many changes. The growth in the number of women workers in the state-owned sector started to decline by the end of 1970s. 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.’ p 116

‘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.'

p 118

'.... 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 [Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs] 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 in schools.'

pp 119-120

'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 labour force, of which 88% were women (Women Newspaper, July 26, 1999).'

p 120

'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.'

p 121

'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.'

p 122

'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....

Household economic activities are unstable, especially among those of small scale....

..... 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. pp 122-123

“The uncertainty and lack of a legal base for labour relations [in the non-state sector]. 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-term 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.’ p 124

‘The implementation of social policies on female workers in private enterprises varies from case to case..... many private managers and owners implement their maternity policy at will, not following any rule, law or regulation relating to female labour.’ p 124

‘Studies indicate that the role of trade unions in private enterprises is very vague..... This is a weakness that is often abused by business owners, including foreigners who often impose rules that are disadvantageous to female workers.’ p 125

‘Unstable jobs are another problem facing female workers in the private sector.’ p 125

‘..... most women are working in low-income sectors and in low wage jobs. The second feature is that the income of the majority of the female workers is not only below the minimum but also lower than men. the third is that the wages and salary of female workers and employees is unstable.’ p 126

‘... up to 42% of female workers have an income that does not cover basic needs such as food and clothing for their families.’ p 126

‘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.’ p 127

‘Female workers in the education and health care sectors have such low income that it is a serious and pressing concern..... this is one of the reasons why an increasing number of primary school teachers have been quitting their jobs in recent years.’ p 127

‘..... 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..... what we have discussed in chapter III [it must mean chapter IV] [pages 87-130] is not aimed at discovering or emphasizing the results and the 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.’ pp 128-129

‘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..... 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.’ p 129

‘... 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.’ p 131

‘... lack of responsibility and a primary focus on making profits, enterprises are not concerned with improving working conditions....

female workers.... have to accept poor working conditions, which badly affect their health.’ p 132

‘... a large number of female workers are now working in conditions of poor hygiene and safety.’ p 132

‘.... female farmers are working under alarming conditions at present.’ p 133

‘Due to lack of knowledge and means of protection, using pesticides has been negatively affecting the health and reproductive functions of women there [in Phu Hoan commune et al.]’ p 133

‘... 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.... Because of... the especially difficult economic situations of farmers, farmers concerns with labour safety have been limited or non-existent.’ p 134

‘Ethnic people in the mountains have to use simple and obsolete working tools.’ p 134

‘... working conditions in private businesses are poorer than in co-operatives.’ p 134

‘... workers in some companies have to work in environments with dirt exceeding 312 times the standard (Dang Lan, *Labour Security and Sanitation in Technology Transfer and Foreign Investment into Vietnam*, Vietnam Woman Newspaper, June 2, 1998 [probably 1995]).’ p 135

‘... 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..... Some machines have even been imported which date from the start of the last century. The importation of equipment that is 30-40 years out of date is not only a negative aspect of technology transfer and investment but also creates the potential for harming the operators.’ p 137

‘.... joint ventures have not been paying adequate attention to dealing with waste pollution in the working environment.’ p 137

‘... the working intensity and long work hours in joint ventures create factors that directly affect and depress workers.’ p 137

‘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.’ p 138

‘At many places [SOEs], the positive efforts of labour protection work done in the past have not been continued.’ p 138

‘Like business in the non-state sector, managers of state companies explain that they translate expenditures of safety gear into wages, forcing workers to buy the equipment.’ p 139

‘According to 1990 statistics from the Ministry of Health, only 37% of Vietnam’s total population had access to clean water.’ p 140

‘Many households have not separated animal sheds and coops from living areas.’ p 141

‘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.’ p 141

‘.... 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.’ p 142

‘.... the anticipated consequences of poor working conditions.... include work-related diseases and a worsened state of health for a large portion of female workers.’ p 143

‘.... 41% of children are malnourished and underweight.’ p 146

‘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

cannot 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.’ p 146

‘..... 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 underdeveloped 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 attainment of educational degrees by men and women is increasing.’ p 147

‘.... the gap in the educational attainment between men and women and between urban and rural areas is relatively large.’ p 148

‘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.’ p 155

‘..... 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.’ p 158

‘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.’ p 161

‘.... 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.’ p 162

‘.... low rates and levels of technical and technological advances would hardly encourage workers and employees to improve their skills and knowledge.’ p 165

‘... 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.’ p 170

‘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.’ p 172

‘Women leaders in social organizations 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.’ pp 179-180

‘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.’ p 181

‘Women entrepreneurs not only help to increase wealth, create jobs and generate income for 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 orientated to 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.’ pp 183-184

‘Most urban women entrepreneurs are those who used to work in the state sector.’ p 184

‘... 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.’ p 184

‘Some of them [women entrepreneurs] even felt regret at not having started a business earlier, having bypassed a lot of opportunities and wasting much time to get rich.’ p 185

‘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.’ p 185

‘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.

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 arisen 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.’ pp 186-188

‘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.’ p 191

‘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 polygamous marriages of the past.’ p 197

‘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.’ pp 197-198

‘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.’ p 198

‘The Law of people's 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 own 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 the highest rate of abortion in the world.’ p 202

‘..... 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 emphasized 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.’ p 221

‘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.’ p 230

‘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 is 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-based enterprises.’ p 231

‘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.’ p 231

‘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.’ p 233

‘There are many cases in which elderly people are poorly treated by their children or abandoned.’ p 234

‘The situation became serious when several forms of agricultural co-operatives 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.’ p 235

‘**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.’ p 236

‘Recently, the focus of social policies for women, as we have analysed, has prioritized state workers and employees. This position stems from simply understanding the steps for building socialism, and this approach to identify the policy object did not 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 and female workers in the 1960s and 1970s, and many women had joined the social labour 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 orientated 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.’ p 237

‘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?’ pp 237-238

‘Creating material schemes to maintain the incomes of the female work force in order to avoid any disturbances or discontinuity.....
Building and organizing a network of kindergartens, pre-schools at workplace to free working mothers from having to care of their children;
Providing adequate working conditions and environment for women.....

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 decreases 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.’
pp 239-240

‘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 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.’ pp 241-242

‘.... To work for the state, one had to have an educational degree, improved professional skills and political knowledge. This aspect has also had an 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 were appropriate for a time, however, if mechanically applied to today’s situation would lead to the following problems.

- The resulting education and training emphasizing degrees too much and neglected work skills; training programs were inclined toward educating public servants but neglected self-employment and income generation opportunities.....
- 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.
- Th 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 centres for training.

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.’
pp 242-243

‘..... there is the lack of a perception and understanding on the part of officials and party members about responsibilities of the party and society regarding the implementation of social policies on women.’ p 249

‘Other reasons stem from the lack of 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.’ pp 249-250

‘(31/CP dated March 8, 1967) on strengthening the female labour 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.’ p 253

‘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?”.....

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.’ pp 259-261

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.’ pp 261-262

‘... 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.’ p 263

‘[after 1989] 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 expenditure is continuing to increase..... existing schemes tend to be maintained but provisions concerning them are less powerful.’ pp 265-266

‘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. Favoring 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.’ p 267

‘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.’ p 272

‘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 sustainable development of the country.’ p 274

‘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%.’ p 274

‘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 2,100 k calorie per day.’ p 275

‘The unemployment rate is still relatively high. The unofficial number is 20%. The gap between rich and the poor is increasingly widening in both regional and gender terms.’ p 276

‘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.’ p 276

‘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.’ pp 277-278

‘In the past, every man or woman joining the social labour force was provided with a lifetime job, so the problem of job opportunities for women was basically addressed in that way.’ p 279

‘In the market economic mechanism, the government and state do not ensure jobs any longer.’ p 280

‘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 labour, for example, along with the state, private enterprises and joint ventures with foreign investors are now also labour employers.’ p 280

‘.... 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.’ p 285