



# VIETNAM COUNTRY GENDER ASSESSMENT

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## Acronyms and Abbreviation

ADB: Asian Development Bank	MPI: Ministry of Planning and Investment
AusAID: Australian AID	MSM: Men who have sex with men
CDB: Commune Development Board	NGO: Non Governmental Organizations
DFID: Department for International Development	NSGE: National Strategy on Gender Equality
DHS: Demographic and Health Survey	SAVY: Survey Assessment of Vietnamese Youth
EL: Enterprise Law	SEDP: Socio-economic Development Plan
FDI: Foreign Direct Investment	SME: Small and Medium Enterprises
FSW: Female Sex Workers	SOCBs: State Owned Commercial Banks
GDP: Gross Domestic Product	SRB: Sex Ratio at Birth
GED: Gender Equality Department	STD: Sexually Transmitted Diseases
GNP: Gross National Product	UNAIDS: Joint United Nations Program on HIV/ AIDS
GSO: General Statistics Office	UNDP: United Nations Development Programme
HIV/AIDS: Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome	UNESCAP: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
IBBS: Integrated Biological and Behavioral Surveillance	UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
IDU: Injecting Drug Users	UNFPA: United Nations Population Fund
IFGS: Institute for Family and Gender Studies	UNODC: United Nations on Drugs and Crime
IHBs: Informal Household Businesses	VDR: Viet Nam Development Report
ILO: International Labour Organization	VGA: Viet Nam Gender Assessment
IOM: International Organization of Migration	VHLSS: Viet Nam Household Living Standards Survey
LFS: Labor Force Survey	VWU: Viet Nam Women's Union
LGE: Law on Gender Equality	WB: The World Bank
LTC: Land Title Certificate	WHO: World Health Organization
MDG: Millennium Development Goal	WTO: World Trade Organization
MOLISA: Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs	

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## Executive Summary

Viet Nam has undergone a major socio-economic transformation over the past quarter century, rising from one of the poorest countries in the world to a middle income country. Today it continues to develop rapidly, becoming more integrated with the global economy and undergoing significant regulatory and structural changes.

**Viet Nam has also made remarkable progress on gender equality, but important gender differences still remain.** On the positive side Viet Nam has had considerable progress in addressing gender disparities in education, employment and health. The gender gap in earnings is lower in Viet Nam than in many other East Asian countries. Indeed by a number of measures, women's outcomes have improved significantly. However, upon deeper examination of the data, a number of challenges still remain.

**For example gender differences in poverty are small, but older women – especially in rural areas – are overrepresented among the poor.** Only a small gender gap in poverty is expected since poverty is measured at the household level. Therefore, any differences in poverty would have to be associated with different household structures, and in fact, the major gender difference in regards to poverty has to do with widows, who are both poorer and more numerous than widowers. This points to one key difference between men and women, namely power over assets. For example, even though a 2003 Land Law began a successful effort to include women on LTC's, as of 2008 the majority of LTC's still do not include the woman's name. And while women do have avenues for obtaining credit, access to larger funds often requires the kind of collateral that LTCs can provide. Overall, ethnicity is much more of a driver of poverty than gender.

**Women have made major gains in educational enrolment, but are still highly segregated into particular fields.** The gender gap in primary schooling has been eliminated and women have caught up and even surpassed men in terms of attaining college degrees. The only gender education gap that still exists is among certain ethnic minority groups. However there is a significant degree of segregation of men and women in their fields of study, which is connected to the significant segregation in terms of occupation and industry of employment as well. Another concern is that educational materials still promote gender stereotypes.

**The improvement in health indicators for women has been remarkable, but the problems of HIV and AIDS and gender violence are still significant.** Infant and under age five mortality rates have fallen dramatically, as has maternal mortality, from 233 to 85 deaths per 100,000 live births from 1990 to 2004. Since then progress has slowed, reaching 69 in 2009. Since 2006, women continue to have slightly less access to health care, including lower rates of insurance. The prevalence rate of HIV among those aged 15 to 49 is 0.43%, but it is important to note that nearly three-fourths of all cases are men. This is attributed, at least in part, to changing norms around masculinity and the relaxation

of early restrictions on sexual behavior. Women in Viet Nam continue to be victims of gender based violence. The rate of women ever experiencing physical violence from their husbands was 31.5% in 2010, which was actually below the average rate found in other countries using a similar methodology. The rate for emotional violence, however, was much higher than the average at over one half of all wives experiencing it at some point in their marriage. This violence often leads to injury and also to behavioral problems among children. Unfortunately, it is still often kept hidden, and also unfortunately, growing evidence suggests it is linked to HIV infection.

**One major concern is the rise in sex ratio at birth (SRB) from 106 male births for every 100 female births in 1999 (the approximate biological norm) to 111 in 2009.** SRBs are highest for higher income groups with better access to sonograms and sex selected abortions. For example, for higher parity births among the richest quintile, the SRB is 133.1. At the current SRB, the UNFPA predicts a 10% surplus of men by 2035. This is clearly linked to a culturally based preference for boys.

**The gap in labor force participation and earnings has narrowed considerably, but gender differences remain that may put women at risk.** Women's wages are now about 75% of men's according to the 2009 Labor Force Survey (LFS), not taking into account differences in education or job experience. Nevertheless, differences remain that are suggestive of higher vulnerability for women. The gender distribution of employment by sector provides a broad indication of men's and women's ability to take advantage of emerging opportunities in the wider economy, and data from the 2008 VHLSS suggests that agriculture accounted for 64% of working women in rural areas compared to 53% of working men. Twenty-four percent of male workers in rural areas are to be found in the industrial sector, compared to 14% of women. Similar patterns of gender segregation by sector are found in urban areas.

**Women are also in more vulnerable jobs, for example, own-account work and unpaid family labor, the two categories seen as a minimum estimate of the lack of decent work.** From 2007 to 2009, unpaid family work remained at around 11.7% for men but increased from 13.9% to 22.2% for women. According to LFS estimates, 69% of women were vulnerably employed in 2009 compared to only 54.4% of men (ILO 2010). Moreover, data from LFS 2009 suggests that 36.2% of men and 42.9% of women are classified as unskilled workers. And data suggests there has actually been an increase in occupational segregation since 2006.

**The extent and persistence of informal employment is a challenge that Viet Nam faces in consolidating its middle income status.** Informal employment makes up around 17% of employment in foreign enterprises, 53% in domestic enterprises and 48% in formal household-based enterprises. Informal workers are likely to make very different contributions to future growth in Viet Nam and to need very different kinds of policy support. Gender was clearly a critical factor in labor market outcomes during the recent global economic crisis, and is likely to influence how different groups of workers to fare in its transition to middle income status.

For example, women workers in the labor intensive export factories tend to be worse off than other workers in the formal sector because they are constructed as a cheap and flexible labor force. Women workers in the export sector are vulnerable to global market fluctuations both because of their direct exposure to these forces and because they are employed on an informal basis.

**Lower wages and far worse working conditions prevail in small informal family-run enterprises and among casual labor.** Particularly disadvantaged are migrant women, widows, older women, ethnic minorities, and women with disabilities. Many of these women are landless or lost their land to industrial parks and urbanization. These are the women who are least able to access the opportunities generated by Viet Nam's integration into the global economy. Many are also unable to take advantage of targeted training or employment schemes intended for the poor.

Informal household businesses operate under precarious conditions, with few written contracts and little access to public services. Not integrated into the formal economy, their main markets are within the informal sector and their main competition is with each other. Conditions are better among formal enterprises where now one of every three is woman owned, compared to 20% in the 1990s

**Another thing that has not changed is the gender distribution of unpaid work.** Data from the 2008 VHLSS suggests that men continue to contribute significantly less to housework than women. This can serve as a barrier to women's full participation in the labor market.

**Political participation is another important area where gender differences emerge.** Even though representation of women in the National Assembly is high by regional standards and there is a woman member of the Politburo, there are signs that women do not have an equal voice in the public sphere. In fact, there are some indications that women's representation in some areas, for example the 2011-2016 National Assembly term, got slightly worse, from 27.3% for 2002-2007 to 24.4% for 2011-2016.

**Viet Nam has passed important laws and policies in relation to gender equality but implementation is far from satisfactory,** due to a lack of knowledge of these laws, a lack of implementing capacity, the limited presence of women in public decision-making forums and in politics more generally. This is recognized by the Vietnamese government in its National Strategy on Gender Equality. The Government and the Central Party have set specific targets for women's participation in leadership and management.

**Yet, there are a variety of obstacles that women face in public life,** including the unequal burden of unpaid work which limits women's involvement in the workplace and in civic society. A second major obstacle is the attitudes encountered in public life. There is resistance on the part of many men to women taking up leadership positions but also among women. A study of the Viet Nam Women's Union found that a large number of respondents would choose men to the highest positions.

Other barriers to women's leadership includes lip service to gender equality policy commitments rather than the institution of concrete measures, the ad hoc implementation of the government's female leadership quota policy and the lack of monitoring and assessment. Also, the regulation regarding retirement age is an example of direct discrimination that requires women retire at age 55 while men retire at 60. This not only terminates women's careers at an earlier age than men, but has knock-on effects on other aspects of their careers, such as whether they are selected for advanced training later in their careers.

**Women's ability to participate in public decision-making processes goes beyond the formal political and policy domain.** The Ordinances on Grassroots Democracy passed by the National Assembly in 2007 is intended to provide a framework to promote democratic participation at the local level, 'to allow citizens to know, to discuss, to act and to monitor socio-economic development'. There is also greater emphasis on decentralizing decision-making within development programs and projects at district and commune levels to achieve a closer fit between needs and design. In fact, involving women in development projects and programs has provided a widely used route to increasing their participation in public life. However, participatory poverty monitoring points out that many of the barriers that women face higher up in the public sector are also encountered at the grassroots level. Research shows that the Women's Union is generally the most active among mass organizations around various development programs relating to family and economic matters, although capacity varies considerably at the local level.

## Recommendations

This report makes a series of recommendations aimed at helping to keep Viet Nam moving along the path to gender equality. They focus on cross cutting areas as well as recommendations specific to areas highlighted in the report. They also include recommendations to help with the implementation of national strategies designed to address them.

An earlier version of this report had a long list of recommendations, but a stakeholder workshop was held in Hanoi in August of 2011 for the purpose of selecting a few key cross-cutting priorities and a few priorities corresponding to the core chapters of the report. Participants were asked to read the report and then work together to put forward recommendations that had the highest priority, were practical, and could serve as a basis of partnership between stakeholders.

### *Cross Cutting Recommendations*

#### **Recommendation 1.1: Improve implementation of the Law on Gender Equality and the National Strategy on Gender Equality**

This can be done by building awareness and capacity within the relevant ministries and by increasing systems of monitoring, evaluation, and accountability.

**Recommendation 1.2: Increase the involvement of men and boys when addressing gender issues.**

It is now widely recognised that men and boys have a critical role to play in the advancement of gender equality. Many barriers to equality stem from norms and attitudes that cut across gender, for example attitudes towards women's leadership and responsibility for household chores. In addition, sometimes, as with certain health issues, males are at greater risk of negative outcomes.

**Recommendation 1.3: Increase the quantity and quality of data research for monitoring and analyzing gender issues.**

Despite the increasing attention to gender issues within the policy domain, data on key gender issues continues to lag behind. In addition, research is needed on culture and norms and how they influence family and work decisions.

*Gender Poverty and Well Being*

**Recommendation 2.1: Revise education curricula and materials to better promote gender equality.**

Continued efforts are necessary to transform the content of educational materials and text books in order to break down gender stereotypes, encourage girls to enter various fields of study, address various aspects of sexuality and gender identity which contributes to gender-based violence, other forms of violation of women's human rights, and sex selected abortions

**Recommendation 2.2: Promote a comprehensive, cross-sectoral response to the problems of gender based violence.**

More needs to be done to ensure the implementation of the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control. Dealing with domestic violence will require a multi-sector approach within a nationally co-ordinated program. Actions should include: a comprehensive health sector response, strengthening the capacity of police and judicial systems to implement gender based violence policies and legislation, strengthening political commitment and action, and promoting primary prevention.

*Gender, Employment and Livelihoods*

**Recommendation 3.1: Increase training and incentives for women to enter a broader range of occupations.**

More efforts should be made to use vocational training to increase productivity of both men and women in the face of changing labour market demands. Pro-active measures should be taken to get encourage women to enter a more diverse set of occupations and industries. Public-private collaboration in the provision of training to young men and women, which brought training institutes

into partnership with private sector firms, has proved particularly successful in other counties in getting young women into the labour market.

**Recommendation 3.2: Address the double work burden through better infrastructure and policy supports**

In addition to parental (including paternity) leave and child care, investment in infrastructure and services that serve to lighten women's domestic and care workloads should be undertaken. Investments in infrastructure, such as water, sanitation and electricity, and the provision of basic services in health and education, can significantly reduce the demands on women's time. Such investments – particularly in accessible and affordable care services – not only expand women's ability to participate in the labor market but also in the public life of their communities more generally.

*Gender and Political Participation*

**Recommendation 4.1: Equalize the mandatory retirement ages for women and men.**

Mandatory retirement at age 55 is a significant barrier to increased leadership of women in government position, both by making women leave the labor force but also by lessening the training they receive because of the anticipation of their early retirement.

**Recommendation 4.2: Build the capacity for women's empowerment and involvement in civic life**

This can be done through a variety of mechanisms, including increased training and development activities for women in government, and through more gender sensitive educational curricula. In addition, one of the most effective ways to empower women to take greater control over their own lives and to play a greater part in shaping the societies in which they live is to build their collective capabilities.



**OVERVIEW AND APPROACH OF THE VIET NAM COUNTRY GENDER ASSESSMENT****1.1 Socio-economic transformation in Viet Nam: a brief overview**

Viet Nam has undergone a major socio-economic transformation since it embarked on the transition from planned to market economy in the late 1980s. People's lives differ significantly, and not only because their incomes are higher and their poverty rates are lower. They are more likely to live in cities, have a wider array of jobs available – especially outside of agriculture -- have better capabilities to travel, and to communicate with others both internally and internationally. True, significant development challenges remain and various sectors of the population are experiencing these changes to a much greater degree than others, but the dynamism of Viet Nam's economy and society cannot be denied.

Viet Nam has experienced remarkable rates of economic growth: average per capita GDP has progressed steadily from below USD 200 in 1989 to above USD 1,000 in 2009, passing the middle income country threshold of USD 1000 in 2008. It averaged growth rates of 7.5% annually between 2000 and 2007, impressive by both regional and global standards. The economy has undergone a major structural shift from one that was largely based on agriculture to one that is driven by industry and services. The proportion of the GDP accounted for by agriculture declined from 23.3% in 2000 to 17.7% in 2008. Export earnings grew at an average of 18 percent per annum between 1991 and 2009.

At the same time, Viet Nam is undergoing a social transformation. Increasing literacy rates and improved communication systems, including cell phones and the internet, as well as improved transportation, have allowed for a more rapid exchange of ideas. Increased university attendance and migration to urban areas exert an influence on young people's – especially women's -- visions about their life and their place in society (Belanger and Barbieri, 2009). This opening up has created both broader opportunities but also uncertainties in people's lives that are helping transform the social order.

Viet Nam is also becoming more tied into the global community. Accession to the WTO in 2007 increased its integration with the global economy, opening up new opportunities. However, it also increased its exposure to global market fluctuations. The combination of rising food and fuel prices in 2007, swiftly followed by the global financial crisis, sent shock waves through the world economy with repercussions for Viet Nam. Its growth rate slowed down to 6.2% in 2008 and 5.3% in 2009. The manufacturing sector, the main driver of growth between 1997 and 2007, was hardest hit with growth rates of 2.8% in 2009 compared to 13.4% in 2006. Growth rates in agriculture declined

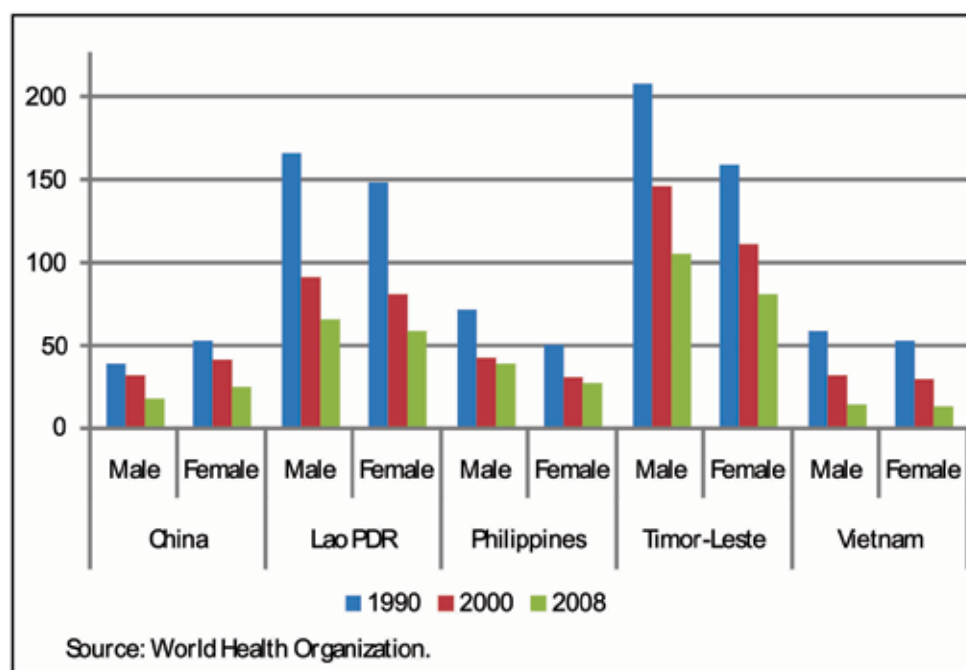


steadily, reaching their lowest level in a decade in 2009 (1.9%). Growth rates in services had been rising from around 2.3% in 1999 to 8.9% in 2007 but also saw a decline in 2008 and 2009. However, compared to most economies, Viet Nam has exhibited a fair amount of resiliency. The growth rate in 2010 dipped to 5.3% but the estimates for 2011 are at about 6.8%. And although some macroeconomic indicators are cause for concern, the dynamism of the economy is still evident.

The rapid growth rates achieved by Viet Nam since the 1990s have been accompanied by only a moderate rise in income inequality, particularly in relation to other countries in the region (UN-ESCAP). Its Gini coefficient has increased from 0.33 in 1993 to just 0.43 in 2010 (GSO, 2011), although questions have been raised about how accurately the Gini coefficient captures the widening gap between the top and bottom quintiles in Viet Nam. A different statistic that suggests an increase in inequality comes from MPI (2006: p. 42) which reports that the income ratio between rich and poor has nearly doubled from 4.43 times in 1993 to 8.14 times in 2002. VDR 2008 also notes abundant anecdotal evidence of a rapid increase in wealth at the top.

What is less open to question is that Viet Nam has performed extremely well in relation to poverty reduction and human development. It has already achieved, or is on track to achieve, most of the MDGs. National poverty rates fell from 37.4% in 1998 to 14% in 2008, among the fastest poverty declines in the Asia region (ILO/MOLISA 2010). The proportion in extreme hunger fell from 24.9% in 1993 to 7% in 2008 (MDG 2010). It achieved universal primary education in 2000 and is on track to achieving universal secondary education. It had reduced under-five mortality from 58% in 1990 to 24% in 2010 while infant mortality rates fell from 44.4% to 16% over this period. In fact, compared to other countries Viet Nam's child mortality rate is low (Figure 1.1)

**Figure 1.1 -- Under-5 mortality by country**

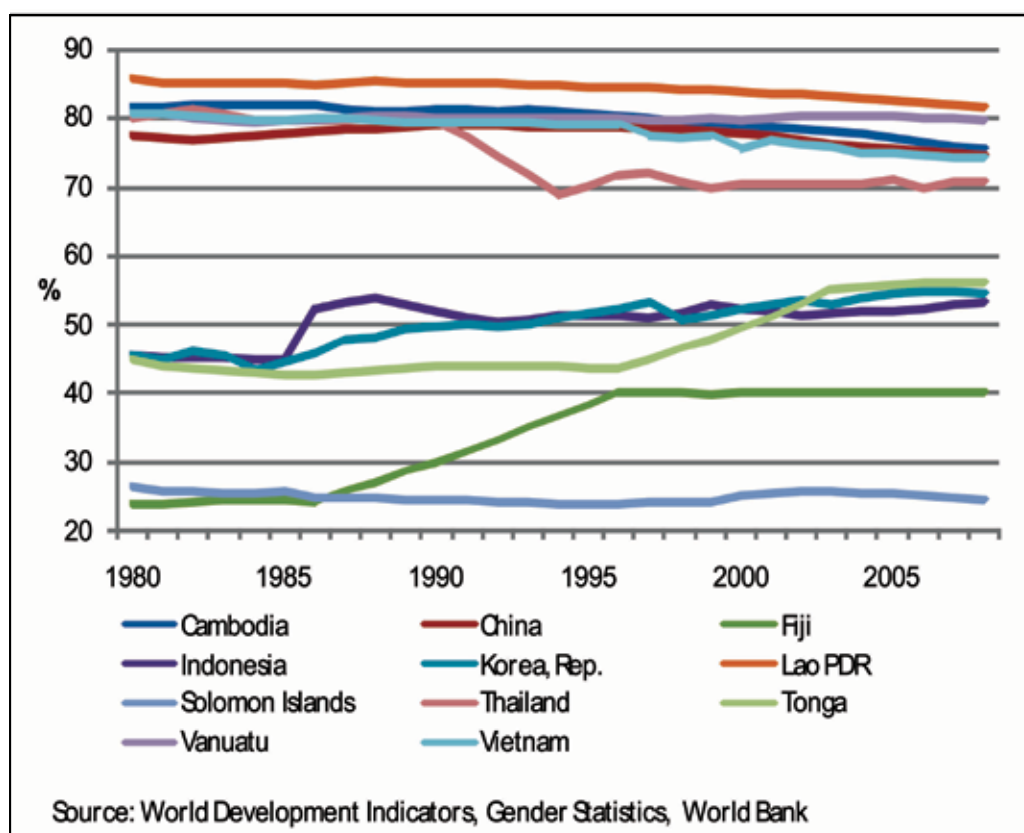


The impact of social change has not been studied as intensively, and is harder to measure. But as poverty declines, people have a greater sense of agency to make work and family decisions. And qualitative work has shown that young people are feeling more freedom in such decisions, and that more young women are experiencing a greater sense of power within families, which is bound to change the dynamics of the work/life choices that construct society (Belanger and Pendakis 2009).

## 1.2 Progress on Gender Equality

The country has also performed remarkably well on gender equality. As the Viet Nam Gender Assessment (VGA) 2006 pointed out, Viet Nam compared favorably with other countries in the region on key gender equality indicators. It had already made considerable progress in addressing gender disparities in education and health and achieved a major decline in maternal mortality. As shown in Figure 1, Viet Nam has also made great progress in child mortality, even in compared to a region that has been making gains. The expansion in economic opportunities has benefitted women as well as men. Women’s labor force participation rates are among the highest in the region (Figure 1.2), and the gender gap in earnings is lower in Viet Nam than many other East Asian countries.

**Figure 1.2 -- Female Labor Force Participation Rates, by country**



For benchmarking purposes, this chapter compares gender indicators in Vietnam with those of other countries in the region or at similar stages of economic development, and draws attention to interesting gender-based interventions in these countries that might be appropriate to draw upon in Viet Nam.

Overall, based on the Gender Inequality Index developed by UNDP, Viet Nam has risen from the low middle-rank group in 1999 to the upper middle-rank group in 2008 (See Table 1.1). This measure relies on a limited number of indicators in the areas of maternal mortality and health, adolescent fertility, parliamentary representation, education attainment and labor force participation. The rankings are meant to be representative of women and girl's opportunities.

Another indicator, the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index, assesses countries based on a different, but related, set of indicators. For example, in addition to labor force participation it includes salary differentials and the rate of women's high skilled employment. For education, it includes literacy, and in the area of health outcomes it focuses on sex ratio at birth and life expectancy. Female empowerment is captured not only by national assembly representation but by the ratio of female ministers and the presence of a female head of state.

Although taking a similar approach, these indicators can generate very different rankings (for example, Japan is ranked 12th and 94th by the two measures) but both indices place Viet Nam

in the middle of the distribution, with the Gender Inequality Index ranking it slightly higher (see Table 1.1).

**Table 1.1 -- International Gender Index Rankings for Viet Nam and other East Asian Countries, 2008**

	Gender Inequality Index (169 Countries)	Gender Gap Index (134 Countries)	Gender Empowerment Index ( 155 countries)
<b>VIET NAM</b>	58	72	52
Cambodia	95	97	83
China	38	61	57
Indonesia	100	87	Not available
Japan	12	94	54
Malaysia	50	98	65
Mongolia	57	27	77
Philippines	78	9	45
Singapore	10	56	16
Thailand	69	57	73

The Gender Empowerment Measure, also developed by UNDP, focuses on political and economic participation and decision making, and power over economic resources. It ranks Viet Nam similarly to the other two indices.

### 1.3 Objectives and methodology

VGA 2006 documented evidence of progress on various aspects of gender equality, especially in the areas of adult literacy, school enrolment and membership in the national parliament. However, it also pointed to aspects where progress has been slow or non-existent, including the highly gender stratified structure of economic opportunities. Women still were employed less than men and earned less when they were employed. Some evidence also suggested a high incidence of gender-based violence and low levels of participation in political decision-making. It also pointed to the emergence of new problems in relation to the spread of HIV, AIDS related diseases, and rising sex ratios at birth (SRB).

Since the publication of the VGA 2006, the Government of Viet Nam (GOV) has taken a number of important steps to accelerate progress on gender equality.

- The Law on Gender Equality (LGE) in 2006 guarantees equal rights to women and calls for gender strategies for each ministry. The Gender Equality Department (GED) in MOLISA was established to help implement the LGE.
- The Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control was enacted in 2007, which along with a subsequent launch of a public awareness campaign targeted at men that aims to reduce gender based violence
- The National Strategy on Gender Equality (NSGE) was adopted in 2010.

However, implementation on these various laws and policies has been slow. As the National Strategy on Gender Equality points out, “Policies and laws on gender equality have not been enforced seriously... (Part 1, Section 1b.)” The Gender Equality Department maintains that this is partly due to a lack of capacity across ministries.

Development Partners and the GOV worked together to create the Joint Program on Gender Equality in Viet Nam, which is being implemented jointly by the GOV and twelve UN agencies. In partnership with the GOV, the Program has provided coordinated assistance to the implementation of the LGE and the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control.

This was judged to be an opportune moment to undertake another gender assessment and establish an analytical basis for charting out an updated gender strategy focusing on the government’s stated priorities.

The VGA process has been led by the World Bank in collaboration with its Development Partners. A series of consultations have been carried out with the GOV and other stakeholders to solicit key themes to be addressed by the VGA. These included meetings with the GED of MOLISA, and a workshop with stakeholders, including the Joint Program on Gender Equality, as well as a representative from the drafting committee of the NSGE, to discuss a draft version of the Country Gender Action Plan prepared by the World Bank. The main identified themes were employment and livelihoods, gender-based violence, women's leadership and rising sex ratios at birth. A decision was made to have a primary focus on employment and livelihood production, where original quantitative research was commissioned analyzing the 2008 VHLSS, and the 2007 and 2009 LFS, among other sources.

The overall objective of VGA 2011 is to provide a basis for setting out priority areas in the issue of gender for the World Bank, other development partners, the government and civil society, and to expand on the themes of equal opportunity and fallout from social change presented in the 2006 CGA using a variety of new data sources. As the consultation process revealed, Viet Nam continues to make considerable progress on gender equality on a number of fronts but faces barriers, reversals and challenges in others. Some of these are long standing ones that were discussed in the earlier report, such as gender based violence and low levels of political representation. Others are new or have taken on greater significance in the intervening period, such as the rising sex ratio at birth.

#### **1.4 The changing context**

The changing regulatory and industrial landscape and global integration have the potential for gendered effects, since, as this report explains below, the structure and nature of women's work can be different from men's. This affects not only possible gender impacts of changes in the labor market but also the coverage of social protection policies that are tied to formal employment.

Since the last CGA in 2006, a number of changes have occurred that have brought new challenges to the forefront of policy discussions in Viet Nam. Accession to the WTO opened up new opportunities and new challenges in the global economy. Of particular relevance to the concerns of this report is the increased attention that it draws to the regulatory framework governing labor standards in member countries. The global financial crisis was a stern reminder of the downside of Viet Nam's closer integration into the global economy. There had been a sharp increase in FDI in the aftermath of accession to the WTO but it was followed by decline in 2009 as a result of the crisis. As we noted, overall growth rates and growth in exports also declined as a result of the crisis. Along with other countries in the region, Viet Nam introduced an economic stimulus package in response to the crisis, including subsidized short term loans to ease access to credit by enterprises, public investment for infrastructure and social services, temporary tax concessions for firms and individuals and a social security package to support poor households, containing an unemployment insurance scheme for workers on at least one year contracts with foreign, government or domestic companies.

Action on social security fed into an on-going process of reforming and developing a national system of social protection begun before the crisis. Mandatory social insurance systems for illness, old age, disability, work accidents and death had already been introduced for public and private sector employees. In addition, there was voluntary social insurance for the self employed, farmers, students and workers with short term or no contracts. Free means-tested social assistance was available for vulnerable groups to provide cash transfers, access to health care and other basic services. However, social protection coverage in Viet Nam remains low by Asian standards.

The other challenge of Viet Nam's transition to middle income status in 2008 is the prospect of what has been referred to as 'the middle income trap'. This is spelt out in relation to Viet Nam by the Joint Country Assessment, which points out that Viet Nam's transition to middle income status has been driven by extraordinary performance on the export front. However, its attractiveness for FDI and its comparative advantage as a source of exports is the availability of a large pool of cheap rural labor which can be drawn into employment at a stable low real wage rate. Furthermore, 'the very success of the low-wage export strategy undermines its continuance: rapid growth results in rising household incomes, increasing scarcity of labor at current wages, the emergence of shortages and upward pressure on wage rates. Growth can only continue if there is a shift into higher value-added activities: 'rather than shift labor from doing nothing or collecting firewood to sewing shirts, economy must move from sewing shirts to electronics' (p. 63). This means competing with other countries at the high end of the value chain and in industries where cheap labor may not be much of an advantage. Higher value added activities need more and better physical infrastructure, improved and regulatory systems, adoption of new technologies and, 'undoubtedly among the greatest and most urgent development challenges', the development of a more skilled and productive workforce.

## 1.5 Organization of the report

The report is organized into five chapters. The current chapter has provided a background to the report and the process through which it has been prepared. The next three chapters will deal with the substantive issues, focusing primarily on gender but addressing ethnicity and other forms of social inequality where relevant. Chapter 2 will provide an analysis of the situation and trends in gender equality in relation to the multiple dimensions of poverty, some of which are included in the MDGs. Chapter 3 will provide an in-depth gender analysis of livelihoods and employment, bearing in mind the likely impact of the recent crisis as well as the challenges of transition to middle income status. Chapter 4 will pick up on the issue of women's political participation in leadership positions and in the wider society. The final chapter will synthesize the key findings of the report and prioritize key recommendations.



**GENDER, POVERTY AND WELL BEING: PROGRESS, REVERSALS AND BARRIERS**

The contradictory nature of Viet Nam's performance in relation to gender equality testifies to a society characterized by cross-cutting historical traditions and contemporary forces. On the one hand, Viet Nam has outperformed many other countries in terms of gender equality with equivalent, or even higher, levels of economic development. Its government has gone further than most to use legislative changes and social programs to institutionalize gender equality. On the other, it not only continues to report old forms of gender inequality, such as high levels of gender-based violence, but also new forms such as the rising sex ratios at birth, indicative of the selective abortion of female fetuses.

There is a tendency in some studies to ascribe various aspects of gender differentials to the Confucian influence on Vietnamese culture. Thus explanations of the recent rise in sex ratios at birth are widely attributed to the patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal organization of gender and family relations in Viet Nam, one that it shares in common with other East Asian countries which have reported abnormally high sex ratios at birth (Belanger et al, 2003). However, other authors have pointed to the greater egalitarianism of Vietnamese culture, the high levels of economic participation by women, their responsibility for managing household budgets and the absence of marked gender discrimination in basic health and nutritional indicators.

It would probably be more accurate to describe Viet Nam as straddling both the strong patriarchal structures of East Asia and the more egalitarian gender relations that prevail in South East Asia, where the phenomenon of masculine sex ratios is not observed (Hirschman and Minh, 2002). What it undoubtedly shares in common with East Asia are Confucian belief systems and a culture of son preference which values sons not only for their economic contributions and support to parents in old age, but also on symbolic grounds to maintain the ancestral line. While several decades of socialist government in Viet Nam have promoted a more egalitarian legal and policy framework, Confucian values about gender propriety, including essentialist constructions of women's nature have not disappeared from official discourse (Schuler et al 2006). The transition to the market economy and increasing integration into the global economy has brought about other changes in gender relations, both women's increasing incorporation into paid work and laws to promote greater gender equity but also new forms of gender-related discrimination.

This chapter is concerned with tracking progress and reversals in gender equality in relation to various aspects of human well-being and capabilities. Levels of income are clearly an important determinant of these aspects but gender inequality is not primarily a problem of poverty. It reflects discriminatory values and attitudes that cut across class although its manifestations may vary by class as well as ethnicity and location. These manifestations that are better captured by a more multi-dimensional



approach to poverty and well-being, such as that embodied in the MDGs, particularly in the light of the broader interpretation given to these goals in the Vietnamese context.

## 2.1 Income poverty is declining but not the same among all groups

As noted in the previous chapter, poverty has been declining continuously in Viet Nam: 58% of individuals lived below the poverty line in 1993 compared to 14.5% in 2008 (MDG Report 2011). Extreme poverty, as measured by food deficits, is currently 7%, roughly the same as in 2006. Poverty has gone down across the board: in rural as well as urban areas, for different ethnic groups and across different regions.

However, as Table 2.1 shows, the pace of poverty decline has been uneven. Indeed, it should be noted that in regards to inequality across the country – be it income, poverty, literacy, or just about any other social measure -- ethnicity is much more of a driver than gender. For example, in 2008 the poverty rate for the Kinh majority was 9.0% compared to 50.3% for ethnic minorities, who make up about 15% of the population. This compares to poverty rates of 23.1% and 69.3% in 2002. Poverty remains higher in rural areas (18.7%) than urban (3.3%). It is higher in some regions than others: the Northwest region had levels of poverty about three times the national average while the Red River Delta, the Southeast and the Mekong River Delta were among the most prosperous.

Of course, poverty measured at the household level does not speak to the intra-household allocation of resources, that is, to what extent males and females benefit from the resources at the household's disposal. For example, as discussed later, women seem to have less control over assets. On the other hand there is not a significant difference in other gender indicators pertaining to health or investment in children's education.

Another issue is the difference between measuring poverty based on consumption, versus a multidimensional indicator (Alkire, 2010, Ravallion 2011). This report opts to present consumption poverty, but then to address other social indicators – such as health, education, domestic violence which affect the quality of life.

Food poverty among ethnic minority households, at nearly 30%, is ten times that among the ethnic majority. However, ethnic minorities in Viet Nam are not uniformly poor. The Muong and Thai groups have living standards similar to the majority Kinh. Other groups such as the Hmong and Khmer continued to experience greater poverty.

**Table 2.1 -- Income poverty trends 1993 to 2008 by location, gender and ethnicity**

	1993	1998	2002	2004	2006	2008
	Unit: percent					
<b>WHOLE COUNTRY</b>	<b>58.1</b>	<b>37.4</b>	<b>28.9</b>	<b>19.5</b>	<b>16.0</b>	<b>14.5</b>
<b>Urban - Rural:</b>						
Urban areas	25.1	9.2	6.6	3.6	3.9	3.3
Rural areas	66.4	45.5	35.6	25.0	20.4	18.7
<b>Ethnic groups:</b>						
Kinh majority	53.9	31.1	23.1	13.5	10.3	8.9
Other ethnic groups	86.4	75.2	69.3	60.7	52.3	50.3
<b>By gender of household owners:</b>						
Male	60.8	39.9	31.1	21.2	17.2	15.5
Female	47.9	28.2	19.9	13.2	11.8	10.8
<b>By geographical regions:</b>						
Red River Delta	62.7	29.3	22.4	12.1	8.8	8.1
Northeast	81.6	62.0	38.4	29.4	25.0	24.3
Northwest	81.0	73.4	68.0	58.6	49.0	45.7
North Central Coast	74.5	48.1	43.9	31.9	29.1	22.6
South Central Coast	47.2	34.5	25.2	19.0	12.6	13.7
Central Highlands	70.0	52.4	51.8	33.1	28.6	24.1
Southeast	37.0	12.2	10.6	5.4	5.8	3.5
Mekong River Delta	47.1	36.9	23.4	19.5	10.3	12.3

*(Source: General Statistics Office VHLSS 1993, 1998, 2002, 2004, 2006 and 2008)*

<sup>1</sup>The poverty rate as used in this report is the proportion of the population whose per capita expenditure is below the poverty line (by international standards). The food poverty lines applied in 1993, 1998, 2002, 2004, 2006 and 2008 were 750, 1,287, 1,382, 1,500, 1,915 and 2,607 thousand Viet Nam Dong per capita per year respectively, which are the equivalent sufficient expenditure for 2,100 Kcal/person/day of food. The poverty lines applied for 1993, 1998, 2002, 2004, 2006 and 2008 were 1,160, 1,790, 1,917, 2,077, 2,560, and 3,358 thousand Viet Nam Dong per capita per year respectively, which are the equivalent sufficient expenditure for 2,100 Kcal/person/day of food plus certain basic non-food expenditure like housing and clothing.

Gender on its own is not closely correlated with household poverty in Viet Nam, but of course poverty is measured at the household level, so any gender differences in poverty would have to be associated with different household structures. Yet, while national estimates suggest that women are marginally more likely than men to live in poor households (Rodgers and Menon 2010), female-headed households are, and have consistently been, less poor than male heads: 10.8% compared to 15.5%, according to VHLSS (2008). In fact, 18.4% of male headed households are to be found in the poorest expenditure quintile compared to only 13.2% of female households.

However, the intersection of gender with certain individual and group characteristics does have an association with poverty. Disaggregating household headship by marital status in the VHLSS survey, for instance, suggests that 15.5% of the only 193 households headed by widowed men were to be found in the poorest quintile (out of a total of 6939 male headed households) compared to 17.8% of

the 1073 households headed by widowed women (out of a total of 2250 female headed households). In other words, not only were there more households headed by widowed females but a slightly higher percentage of them were in the poorest sections of the population.

The intersection of gender with age also influences the distribution of income poverty in Viet Nam. Children and the elderly are more likely than working age adults to live in relatively poor households. This is clearly related to dependency ratios. They are also the group most likely to display a large female disadvantage in poverty. Ethnicity also intersects with gender, with larger gender gaps reported by ethnic minorities. Paradoxically, the largest gender poverty gap is to be found among the better off Khmer/ Cham minority ethnic groups, reinforcing the point that while gender inequality is linked to poverty, the relationship can be complex and be manifested to a different extent across various cultures and circumstances.

## 2.2 Land use rights have improved but gender gaps remain

Land remains among the most valuable assets available to most people in Viet Nam (Ravallion and Van de Walle 2008). As a World Bank survey pointed out, none of those interviewed owned any assets of equivalent or greater value.

Land only became available to individuals as a result of the de-collectivization process associated with Doi Moi. The 1993 Land Law began the transfer of long-term use rights to land, previously administered by the co-operatives, to households, transforming land into a quasi-private productive asset. However, only 10-12% of land use certificates were issued to women in the first ten years after the reform because there was only room for one name on the certificate and it was generally issued to the household head, who was usually male.

Criticisms of the gendered consequences of the law led to a reformulation in the 2003 Land Law which allowed for the names of both husband and wife to be stated on the LTC. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment issued guidelines stating that land use titles issued before 2004 should be replaced with titles which clearly stated the name of both spouses. As a result, there has been a gradual increase in female-only and joint holders of land-use titles for annual agricultural and residential land across regions and household characteristics since 2004. In comparison to 2004, the percentage of male-only holders has fallen from 66% to 62%, whereas the percentage of female-only and joint holders has increased slightly from 19% to 20% and from 15% to 18%, respectively.

Overall, according to the 2008 VHLSS, about one-quarter of women aged 31-45 living in households with LTCs have their names included. For women 46 to 60 and over 60, those rates are both about 39%. While no rural/urban difference exists for the younger women, older urban women have an advantage. 41% of urban women aged 46-60 are included on LTCs compared to 36% of their rural peers. For those aged over 60 the difference is larger: 49% compared to 38%. It should be noted, though, that many fewer households in urban areas have land use certificates: 18% compared to

76%.

Female-only land holdings have fallen in urban areas since 2004, whereas the proportion of joint holdings has increased somewhat in rural settings and held fairly steady in urban settings. Disaggregation by ethnic groups shows that female-only and joint holdings have increased slightly among the Kinh but among joint-holdings have increased substantially, from 12 percent in 2004 to 19 percent in 2008. In so far as joint-holdings allow husband and wife equal rights to land, this improvement has occurred among groups that were the most disadvantaged (Rodgers and Menon 2010).

### **2.3 Access to credit and investment opportunities are better for those with LTCs**

The possession of LTCs has major ramifications for access to credit. Access to institutional credit has diversified considerably in Viet Nam and there is now provision for both better off and poorer household. While poor people and ethnic minorities can access subsidized credit from the Bank for Social Policies through the collective guarantee provided by mass organizations, such as the Women's Union, the Farmers' Union and the Youth Union, others access loans from commercial banks, Banks for Agricultural and Rural Development, the Bank for Industry and Trade etc. Landed property is the most valuable asset available to most of this group and these banks generally require LTCs as collateral.

The World Bank study cited earlier shows that procedures for land loans using LTCs with both names on them require less time compared to those with only the name of household head. It also allows both husband and wife to conduct business with banks and for either one to borrow from the bank without authorization from the other. In the case of single name LTCs, such authorization is required. The joint LTC has thus opened up access to bank loans for women who are not household heads.

The possession of land rights enables access to new investment possibilities. In fact, both men and women in the study agreed that having title to land increased women's business activity. Around 42% of respondents in a World Bank study had used LTCs for investment purposes through borrowing, purchasing stakeholder share, leasing land or capital contribution to a business. Around 56% of respondents used their LTCs to invest in off farm enterprise, both handicraft and business, while between 32% and 35% used them to invest in agriculture and other sectors. Women were more likely than men to invest in handicraft and business (64% compared to 51%) while men were more likely to invest in agriculture (81% compared to 61%).

### **2.4 The Education Gender Gap has closed but challenges remain**

The importance of education has been repeatedly highlighted in government plans and policy statements and the country has made remarkable progress on this front. The 2008 VHLSS shows continuation of the increase in educational attainment among younger cohorts of men and women

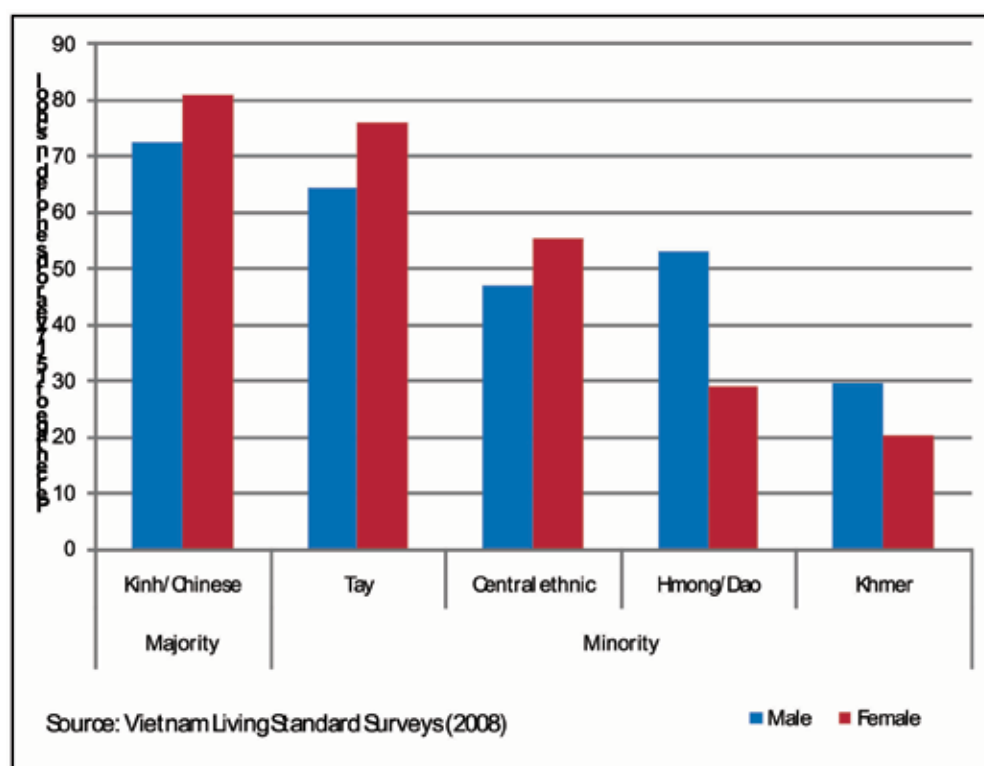
(18-21) which were noted in 2004 and 2006 surveys. Women have caught up or surpassed men in terms of attaining junior college and university degrees. Younger cohorts of children entering school are also more likely to stay on to complete their secondary schooling. As a result, among the current school age children, Viet Nam has closed and even reversed gender gaps in primary, secondary and tertiary schooling.

Nevertheless, grounds for concern remain. They relate to gender disparities by age, ethnicity and location as well as to the content of education. In terms of location, the Northwest region, which has highest levels of poverty, is also the only region reporting marked gender inequalities in education. Among 15-17 year olds, only 53% of girls remained enrolled in school compared to 68% of boys, reproducing a pattern of gender disadvantage noted in VHLSS 2004 and 2006. As far as ethnicity is concerned, The Khmer/Cham and the Northern Mountain ethnic groups all report a female disadvantage in enrolment rates (see Figure 2.1). This is a new development as far as Khmer/Cham groups are concerned and may reflect higher rates of wage employment among this group in 2008. Among the Hmong of kindergarten age, girls are less likely to attend school (72%) than boys (81%). Among the H'Roi minority the gender gap is 25 percentage points. There are also gender gaps in dropout rates among ethnic minorities, for example less than one fifth of H'Roi boys left school while more than 40% of girls did (Chi 2009)

Gender disparities are evident in access to extra tuition which parents increasingly believe will improve grades and which has now become a mainstream educational activity, particularly among upper secondary school students. Among three of the four ethnic minority groups studied there is a clear case of male advantage in access to extra classes which are often taken in addition to regular schooling in order to improve children's chances for attending higher quality secondary and post-secondary education.



Figure 2.1 -- Net secondary school enrollment in Viet Nam, by sex and ethnicity



There are concerns about the gendered content of the education curriculum and the extent to which it equips girls and boys for capacity to take advantage of new opportunities and aspire to achievements beyond those dictated by persisting gender stereotypes (see Box 1). The importance of what is learnt at school affects men and women in later life is illustrated by data from SAVY 2 that shows that among those attending school 66% of female respondents compared to 57% male respondents had received reproductive health and HIV/AIDS education in regular or extra classes at school. Moreover, having learnt about these issues in school appeared to be significantly correlated with their current knowledge about them.

### Box 1: Education Materials

*UNESCO analysis of school text books indicated the presence of numerous gender biases, both of an obvious and subtle nature in the narrative text, illustrations and learning activities of primary school textbooks currently in use in Viet Nam – along with a number of examples of good practices in promoting gender equality. Most of the identified biases can be categorized as stereotypes and cases of invisibility or imbalance between genders. For instance, boys are presented in mathematics textbooks, particularly in illustrations, as ‘strong, masculine, leaders, able to use modern technology, able to work hard, interested in challenging and competitive sports, while girls are presented as singing and dancing, folding origami, able to use household equipment and do housework. In grade 1 to 5 textbooks, men and boys are*

*usually ‘heroes/courageous, strong/able to do complicated and physically challenging jobs, knowledgeable/smart, naughty creative, leaders’ while girls/women are presented as ‘weavers, nice and lovely, caring for someone (as teachers, nurses) clean and ordered, weak/emotional’. ‘Cosmetic’ biases are also present in the textbooks, meaning that while there may be gender parity in textbook contents, more subtle biases still persist despite some superficial or apparent changes made as the result of previous revision processes. At the same time, examples of good practice were also cited from textbooks showing girls and boys working together and sharing tasks in a balanced way as well as work and life situations where boys and girls are depicted as equally trustworthy in achieving and fulfilling their potential.*

Gender disparities also persist in fields of study. At tertiary levels, men are more likely to specialize in engineering, manufacturing, construction and services while women specialize in social sciences, education, humanities and the arts. 29% of men compared to 11% of women enrolled in tertiary degrees focused on engineering, manufacturing and construction while 41% of women compared to 26% of men specialized in social sciences, business and law. The 2006 data showed an even greater clustering of men in engineering. Only in general programs and health do we see similar degrees of clustering. Moreover, while gender parity has been achieved at undergraduate levels, only 30.5 percent of Masters’ degrees and 17.1 percent of PhDs were awarded to women in 2007 (MOLISA 2010).

Finally, the educational disadvantage of those in working age groups has implications for employment. According to the ILO (2010), 2.7% of the male labor force and 4.5% of the female labor force were illiterate in 2007. Larger gaps are to be found in access to technical education within the labor force. While overall levels increased between 2006 and 2007, 70.9% of the female work force still had no technical education in 2007 compared to 60% of the male. These gender gaps in basic literacy and lack of technical and vocational qualifications mean that working women face a major disadvantage relative to working men in today’s labor market.

**Table 2.2 -- Distribution of labor force by technical education and gender (%)**

	No technical level	Technical workers without degree	Short term vocational diploma	Long term vocational diploma	Professional secondary	College/university +
2006						
Male	63.6	20.4	2.7	3.0	4.3	6.0
Female	73.6	13.8	1.6	0.8	4.8	5.5
2007						
Male	59.9	21.5	3.5	3.2	5.4	6.5
Female	70.9	14.9	1.7	1.0	5.2	6.3

*Taken from ILO (2010) Table A1.2*



## 2.5 Health outcomes have improved

Viet Nam has performed very well on the health front, including remarkable achievements on the two hardest-to-reach MDGs, child and maternal mortality. The MDG report attributes this to a general strengthening of the entire health system from central to village level, including increased investment in medical infrastructure, improvement in facilities and equipment and staff training. The government introduced a health insurance program in 1992, four years after the introduction of user fees under Doi Moi, comprising a compulsory scheme for workers in the formal sector and a voluntary one for the rest of the population. The program has been given new impetus since 2004 by efforts on the part of the government to increase the scope and depth of the benefit package for both schemes. Importantly, it has chosen to directly finance participation in the program by increasingly larger populations. Health insurance coverage has expanded from around 25% of the population in 2004 to 40% in 2006. These improvements have had a positive impact on access to health care as well as health outcomes.

## 2.6 Access to health care

In terms of health care availability, VHLSS 2008 data suggests that the majority of those who reported an illness were able to visit a health care worker or centre, suggesting that health care provision is keeping up with the needs of the population. However, there has been an apparent decline in access since 2006. Among individuals reporting an illness, the percentages of men and women who visited a health provider declined from 77% and 78% respectively to 61% and 65%.

The greater likelihood of women than men seeking health care is to be found in all age groups, except the young and old in rural areas. A similar pattern was reported for 2004 and 2006 (Nguyen, 2010). This may have to do with gender differences in patterns of health needs. Generally speaking, women have higher rates of utilization during childbearing years, but when males are very young or very old they are more likely to get services. When men do get services, it is more likely to be for curative care; women have higher rates of preventative care (Rodgers and Menon, 2010)

Around 58% of women had health insurance, compared to about 62% of men, a disadvantage for women that was also observed in 2004 and 2006 (Nguyen 2010). Health insurance appears to serve as an important determinant of the extent to which people seek health care. The highest rates of access to health care are observed for people who have health insurance as policy beneficiaries and people with other voluntary health insurance. People with coverage under these insurance types tend to be older, on average, than people covered by other types of health insurance (Lee 2008). Some of the lowest rates of health care access are found for individuals with no health insurance and for individuals covered by student health insurance, especially in the urban sector. The female advantage in access to health care services holds across most types of health insurance in the rural and urban sectors (in keeping with the 2006 VHLSS), and it is largest for rural residents with non-state health insurance.

Another point worth noting is that serious efforts have been made to extend health insurance to ethnic minority groups in recent years. The percentage with health insurance and free health cards went up from 55% in 2004 to 78% in 2006. The equivalent figures for the ethnic majority were 35% and 49%. Also, as pointed out in a later section of this report, migrants face particular challenges in accessing health care and other social services due to their registration status.

## 2.7 Health outcomes: child mortality and rising sex ratios

Viet Nam was described by the 2007 Asia-Pacific Report on the MDGs as the ‘greatest success story in the region’ in connection with its child mortality rates. During the 1990 to 2009 period, its infant mortality rates had declined from 44.4 per 1000 to 16. This contributed to the decline in under-five mortality rates from 58 in 1999 to 24.4 in 2009 (MDG Report). It is considered to be on target to meet MDG 4, which is to reduce the under-five mortality rate by two-thirds between 1990 and 2015.

Moreover, Viet Nam appears to have achieved this goal in gender-equitable ways. As the graph below shows, given the biological survival advantage that girls have over boys in the early years of life, Viet Nam’s gender differentials in under-five mortality are at the more egalitarian end of the Asia-Pacific spectrum – in contrast to the extreme female disadvantage reported by China and a number of South Asian countries. Indeed, there is very little evidence of marked gender discrimination against girls in earlier studies of health and nutrition. The 2002 DHS found negligible gender differentials in mortality rates among under-five age group while multiple indicator cluster survey 2006 found no excess female mortality among children or infants or discrimination in malnutrition or vaccination (UNFPA, 2010).

In the light of such evidence, the emergence of rising male to female ratios at birth, suggesting the use of sex-selective abortion to ensure the birth of a son, is a worrying new development. While quantitative analysis from the early 1990s found evidence of son preference in observed reproductive behavior, this was generally satisfied by having at least one son rather than the need for many sons as evidenced in parts of South Asia (Haughton and Haughton, 1995). Indeed, Haughton and Haughton found evidence of a weakening of son preference over cohorts.

This appears to have been reversed as noted by Belanger et al (2003) using data from the 1999 census and the 1998 VLSS. Since then, a specially commissioned survey in 2007 by the GSO on this topic has made the picture much clearer. The survey collected data on 1.1 million births, around 76% of the total expected births in 2006. Analysis of the data suggests that sex ratios at birth started to rise from around 106 male births to every 100 female in 1999 at an annual rate of 1% to reach 111 male births in 2006 (UNFPA). This was very close to the SRB found in the 2009 census of 110.6. The rise in SRB does not necessarily indicate an increase in the degree of son preference but rather the desire for lower fertility in a context which is characterized by a culture of son preference, on the one hand, and the recent access to ultrasonic technology which can determine the sex of the unborn child (Hvistendahl 2011). The government’s long-standing two child policy exercises additional downward pressure on fertility preferences. Access to abortion, always widely available in Viet Nam, is now used on a sex selective basis by parents wanting to ensure at least one son.

*Recent qualitative research in four provinces with high SRBs shows strong normative pressures on families to produce at least one son. Sons are essential to their parents because they carry on family lines and names; perform ancestor worship; and take care of parents in their old age. People also prefer sons to daughters because having a son improves a woman's status in the family and confirms a man's reputation in the community, including his perceived masculinity. Men and women with no sons are often exposed to strong pressures within the husband's family. Such moral pressures are felt particularly in the North and among the country's wealthier citizens. In order to produce the family they desire, many couples use of ultrasound to determine the sex of the fetus and induced abortion to eliminate unwanted female fetuses (UNFPA 2010).*

Studies have sought to establish the key factors associated with high SRBs. Guilamoto et al (2009) found sex ratios to be lower among the less well off sections of the population: the less educated (less than 5 years of education), those working at home, no access to prenatal care or medical attendance at birth and likely to deliver at home. By contrast, younger more educated women who reported more than four pre-natal visits, used contraception, had prior knowledge of the sex of the child and worked for the government or a foreign company reported around 110 to 114 boys for every girl born. (This last finding may be indicative of the pressures associated with government's two child policy).

The association with income is also supported by evidence cited in UNFPA (2010). It finds that the richest quintile – those with greater access to sonograms and abortions -- had an SRB of 110.9 for first and second births and 133.1 for subsequent births, suggesting that couples are having higher parity children specifically in an attempt to get a son. People in the poorest income quintile had corresponding SRBs of 105.4 and 104.8, which are both very close to the biologically normal ratio of about 105.

Finally, it is evident that there is considerable regional variation in the distribution of high SRBs, with clusters of high concentration in the more developed provinces of the Red River Delta and around HCM city. There are also local pockets of high SRB values elsewhere including in less developed provinces in the North West region which have higher fertility levels and sizeable ethnic minority populations who would not be expected to subscribe to Confucian values of son preference. This suggests that SRB imbalance could spread in the near future to provinces which have so far remained immune to such behavior.

At the present rate of increase in SRBs, UNFPA estimates that there will be a 10% 'surplus' of men by 2035 with a number of adverse implications, including the possibility that some men may not marry, increasing pressures on women to marry, the rising demand for sex work and the development of trafficking networks. As we note in the next chapter, there is already evidence of a rise in trafficking in Viet Nam, partly in response to female deficits in the marriage markets of neighboring countries.

## 2.8 Maternal mortality

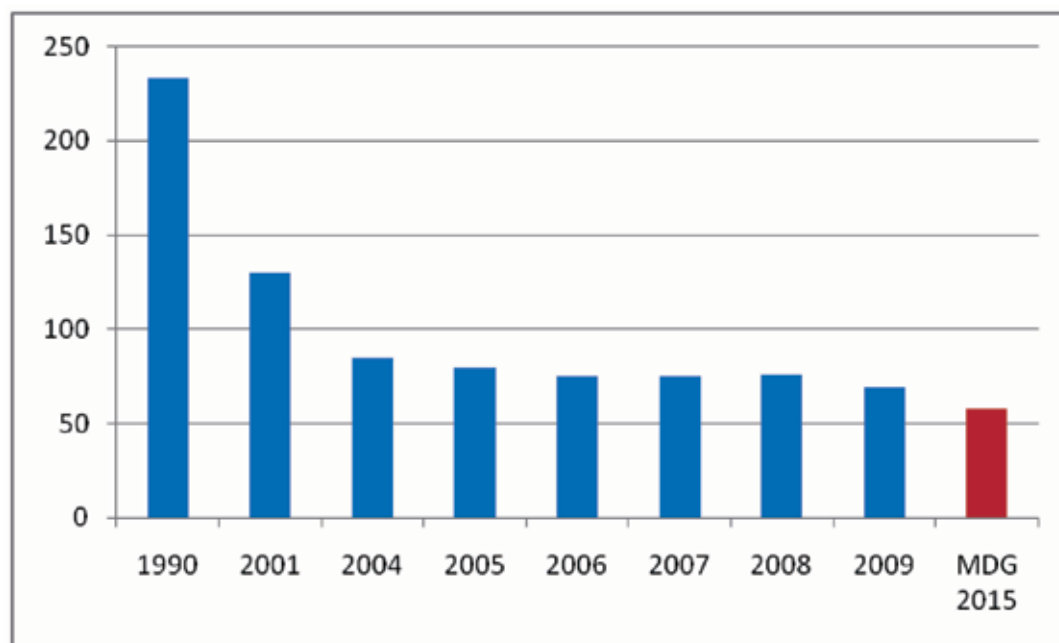
Viet Nam has also made considerable progress on maternal mortality. Maternal mortality has declined from 233 per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 69 in 2009. This is likely to reflect improvements in reproductive health services. The percentage of pregnant women receiving more than three pre-natal visits had reached 86 in 2008, the percentage receiving tetanus injections had reached 95% and the percentage using contraceptive methods had reached 80%. The equivalent figures were 85%, 93% and 77% respectively in 2005.

However, the decline in maternal mortality rates stalled between 2006 - 2009, possibly as a result of the recession. This suggests the need for renewed efforts on the part of the government. Furthermore, outcomes are still very different depending on ethnicity and location. The MDG report notes considerable gaps between urban and rural areas: 79 and 145 according to VHLSS 2008. While ethnic/regional differences in maternal mortality are not reported in the MDG report, major ethnic/regional differences are evidence in access to relevant health services:

- 86% of pregnant women received at least three pre-natal check-ups at the national level, but less than 70% in North West and Central highlands.
- 95% of births were attended by trained health workers at the national level, compared to 79% in the North West.
- 95% of pregnant women received tetanus injections at the national level but only 80% in the North West.

Generally speaking, the outcomes in the more remote, ethnic minority areas are actually quite good compared to similar populations in other countries. But these gaps do show that the remaining health challenges Viet Nam faces are disproportionately in those communities.

**Figure 2.2 -- Maternal Mortality in Viet Nam (maternal deaths per 100,000 live births)**



*Source: MDG Report 2011*

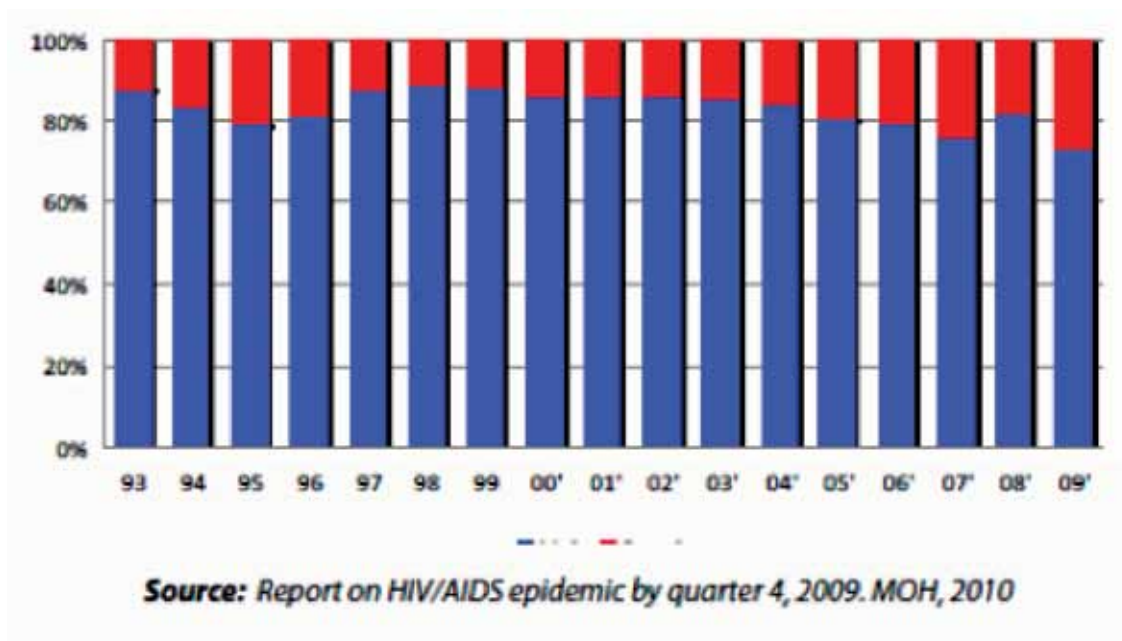
## **2.9 HIV and AIDS related illnesses are a growing problem**

HIV-related illnesses are among the leading causes of premature death in Viet Nam. Since the first reported case in 1990 (McNally, 2002, p.1), the virus has spread to all 63 provinces. At the end of 2009, Viet Nam reported 160,019 HIV cases and 44,050 deaths due to AIDS-related illnesses. In 2009, there were 15,713 newly reported HIV cases and 2,010 AIDS-related deaths. The current HIV prevalence is estimated to be 0.28% across all ages in 2010 (MDG report), but the infection rate for those aged 15-49 is 0.43% (UNGASS Report 2010). The scope of ARV programs has risen steadily from 30% in 2007 to 53.7% in 2009 but, as the MDG report points out, the decrease in number of HIV-related deaths in the last two years cannot be regarded as an indicator of sustained decline.

HIV infection primarily occurs among men (73.2% in 2009) but the numbers of affected women has been increasing rapidly to nearly 100,000 cases in 2005 (Hien et al. 2004). Figure 2.3 shows the slight increase in the percentage of women among people living with HIV. While some of these women were infected through injecting drugs and others through the sale of sex, increasing numbers are contracting the disease through sex with partners or husbands who were infected through their own high-risk behavior. HIV transmission in intimate partner relationship is a key factor in reducing the male to female ratio in the affected population to 2.5:1 by 2012 (MDG Report). The MDG report notes a worrying upward trend in numbers of people contracting HIV through unsafe sex from 12% in 2004 to 29% in 2009. This includes both heterosexual sex, but also men having sex with men (MSM).



**Figure 2.3 -- Distribution of Reported HIV Cases by Gender and by Year, 1993-2009**



Same sex behavior is highly stigmatized in Viet Nam so less is known about this group and the rates of HIV infection. The 2006 IBBS surveys among MSM in Hanoi and HCM found prevalence rates of 5% and 9% respectively. This had increased to 16.7% by 2009. The 2006 survey found that 90% of HIV-positive MSM were unaware of their status, only 16% had a voluntary HIV test in the previous year, only 29% in Ha Noi and 37% in HCM city reported regular condom use with non commercial partners in the previous month – although data from 2009 showed this percentage was as high as 66.5%. About 40% had sex with a female partner in the previous 12 months and a third of those survey identified themselves as ‘straight’ (UNGASS Report 2010)

Sexual partners of injecting drug users (IDUs) are at a higher risk for infection. On the positive side, between 87% and 98% of IDUs in Quang Ninh reported using a sterile needle the last time they injected. In Son La and Vinh Long provinces those percentages were 74.5% and 87% respectively. However, according to 2009 IBBS data, rates of condom usage among IDUs is much lower, averaging about 52%. The variance across provinces is large, however, from 26% to 94% (UNGASS Report 2010).

While the problem of HIV and AIDS related illnesses is clearly not unique to Viet Nam, nor the groups most at risk nor the associated transmission routes, there are claims that the speed with which it has spread since the early 1990s is linked with some of the social transformations that accompanied Doi Moi (Huy et al., 2008; Wegelin-Schuringa and Giang, 2010). These include shift from agricultural co-operatives to household production, the removal of welfare subsidies, the closure of state-owned enterprises in favor of private enterprise, the encouragement of foreign direct investment, the search for export markets.



These changes have been accompanied by high rates of economic growth in Viet Nam and increased levels of disposable income accompanied by growing socio-economic inequalities and the commercialization of many aspects of everyday life. The continued barriers to women's mobility in the labor market combined with the failure to generate sufficient employment to keep up with the growth in the labor force have meant that many women who leave agriculture in search of work have ended up in the sex industry. This has led to a dramatic increase in the number of sex workers, despite the fact that sex work is illegal in Viet Nam and officially classified as a 'social evil' under the government's anti-prostitution law (Phinney, 2006; Anh et al, 2007; HIV Transmission in Viet Nam, 2010).

The latest Survey Assessment of Vietnamese Youth (SAVY 2008-09) highlights the rapid change in attitudes and practices that is taking place among younger people in Viet Nam. "Compared to their parents' generation, youth today have a higher mobility. Many of them go to other places to study or to work for extended period of time... Modern electronic connectivity provides many youth with access to a world of new ideas and images, including a range of sexual images and information and the idealization of various kinds of risk-taking behaviours relating especially to substance abuse and sexual behaviour (p. 18)."

Changing norms around masculinity and male prowess, the relaxation of earlier restrictions on sexual behavior, the commodification of sex and a small but growing space for an expansion of sexual identities and practices that are part of the cultural changes that accompanying the opening up of the economy and the greater freedoms afforded in personal life. For instance, comparisons of SAVY 2003 and 2008 suggest an increase in the percentages of both female and male adolescents who knew that condom use helped to prevent pregnancy, STDs and HIV AIDS and a decline in those who believed it to be problematic for either men or women to be carrying condoms. Another aspect of cultural change is the increase in numbers of men buying sex as well as having sex with men (Phinney, 2006).

As with other countries, the HIV epidemic is made up a number of sub-epidemics, each with their own dynamics. Prevalence of HIV varies considerably by age, gender, occupational group and location in transmission routes. Prevalence in the 15-49 age group was 0.44 % in 2010 and expected to increase to 0.47% by 2012. In fact, the 20-39 group accounted for 80% of total registered cases. It is also concentrated among specific 'high risk' sub-populations, including injecting drug users (IDU), female sex workers (FSW) and men who have sex with men (MSM). For instance, infection rates have increased among female sex workers from 0.6% in 1994 to 6.6% in 2002 (Anh et al, 2007). Women dominate in the sex worker category while men dominate among IDU and MSM.

One other category that has been identified as high risk is male migrant workers, both domestic and international. Away from their homes for long periods of time, many engage in unprotected sex with more than one partner and inject drugs. A survey of 2500 migrant workers in Viet Nam found that 60% were married and thus also put their wives at risk when engaging in risky behavior. In Hai

Phong 20% reported at least one commercial sex partner in the previous 12 months. In Can Tho the rate was only 7%.

Most studies on HIV transmission and programs to abate it have focused on a clearly identified number of groups considered to engage in risky behavior but have tended to ignore the consequences of their behavior on their intimate partners. Thus studies of male clients of sex workers have tended to focus on their sexual behavior as clients but not in relation to their spouses (UNAIDS/UNWOMEN, 2010). A (2002) study in Ha Noi found that one third of men aged 18-55 had sex with a sex worker at least once in their life, 45% had visited sex workers more than five times but only 36% said that they 'always' used condoms. Another study noted that 30% or less of very few sex workers in almost all provinces reported consistent use of condoms with regular partners.

Anh et al (2010) found that both men and women underestimate or minimize women's risk of contracting HIV from their partners, primarily because of lack of knowledge of how it can be transmitted. Thus, in addition to the focus on at-risk groups the issue of intimate partner transmission should be addressed.

The medical and behavioral routes to stopping the spread of HIV AIDS are reasonably well-known. The main challenge in Viet Nam lies in the attitudes, prejudices and preconceptions of the different factors that could make a difference. At-risk groups too often fail to use condoms on a regular basis or take regular HIV tests due to issues of ignorance and discrimination. In addition, compulsory detention for sex work and injecting drug use impose additional challenges for HIV service uptake. There are also inequalities of power that make it difficult for women, whether in the context of commercial or marital sex, to insist on the use of condoms, even when they know of the risks. For instance, a review of reports on 137 calls to a domestic violence hotline found that more than half the women knew that their husbands were having extra marital sex but felt that asking husbands to use condoms would lead to increased physical violence.

There are cultural norms about gender and sexuality which give rise to stigma and discrimination within the community against those groups most at risk, making it harder to them to seek information or services for prevention or care and treatment when they know they are positive. It also makes it harder for them to tell their partners. Gendered norms also dictate that women should forgive and accept husbands' transgressions while husbands are almost always expected to abandon their wives if they are HIV positive.

And finally, there is what Huy et al. term the institutional 'paradox' that characterizes official policies towards those most at risk. Drug abuse and sex work are classified as 'social evils' and much more effort is expended in the punitive regulation of these forms of behavior than in providing the prevention and care services need to bring the epidemic under control. The conditions that prevail in the rehabilitation centers and prisons to which sex workers and drug users may be confined often serve to exacerbate their vulnerability, including to HIV (UN ODC/UNAIDS, 2008). As Anh et al have

pointed out, recidivism is extremely high among sex workers: lack of community support once they have left the centers mean that around 80% will end up back at the centers.

## 2.10 Gender-based violence remains significant

Gender-based violence was raised as an issue in consultations for both the last VGA and the current one. It is also highlighted as a problem in the country's MDG report. Until recently, information on domestic violence was largely restricted to small scale quantitative and qualitative studies but they pointed to the existence of the problem. A number of nationwide surveys had also included questions on domestic violence. The National Study on the Family conducted in 2006 found that 21% of couples had experienced at least one type of domestic violence in the preceding 12 months (including verbal, emotional, sexual and physical). The Viet Nam Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2006 found that 64% of women aged 15-49 accepted violent treatment from husbands as normal. A survey of eight provinces and cities conducted by Viet Nam's National Assembly Committee of Social Affairs found that 30 percent of female respondents were forced to have unwanted sex with their husbands Nguyen et al. (2008).

A national survey specifically on the issue of domestic violence was carried out in 2010 by the GSO and helped to provide a far more comprehensive picture of the problem than hitherto available. The overall life time prevalence rate for physical violence against women by a partner or husband was found to be 31.5%, higher in rural areas than urban and in the South East region compared to the Northern and South Central Coastal region. The current prevalence of violence (in the last 12 months) was higher among younger age groups and declined over time. It was also higher among women with little or no education. Violence during pregnancy was also higher for this group. The life time incidence of sexual violence was lower (10%) but remained roughly the same till the age of 50. Combining the two gives overall estimates of 34.4, suggesting a strong overlap between the two. Emotional abuse was much higher than both, about 53.6% overall. Only 2.8% of women had ever initiated physical abuse against a partner while 87% of those who were physically abused had not fought back. Around 10% of the women interviewed reported experience of physical violence by someone other than a partner, mainly other male family members. 3% of women reported sexual abuse before the age of 15 mainly by strangers. Interestingly, compared to other countries using the same survey methodology, Viet Nam has somewhat lower than average rates of physical violence but higher than average emotional violence.

The survey also collected information on the commonly held views about the causes of violence. What emerges from this information is the extent to which cultural beliefs and attitudes condoned, and even encouraged, violence against women. There was a widespread view that men and women expressed anger differently, that men found it difficult to control their anger because of their biology and that it was women's nature to 'endure'.

In qualitative interviews, women experiencing violence report that they usually keep these events secret, even from close family members. When they do report incidents to the police or other authorities, their complaints are usually dismissed and they are told that these are family matters. Often they feel a responsibility for what is going on, because as women they feel their role is to create a good family life.

The impact of this violence is significant. It can lead to physical injury (26% of those physically or sexually abused) and victims are much more likely to report poor health and emotional distress. Over 30% of them have had abortions, compared to just over 20% of those not experiencing violence. And they were about a third more likely to have a miscarriage. Women experiencing violence report more problems with carrying out daily activities, memory loss, and difficulties walking. Many more of them have children with behavioral problems (27%) than other women (16%). In many cases, their children had also been subjected to violence. Another significant consequence of domestic violence is its inter-generational transmission. Women who had experienced violence were twice as likely to have had a mother who was also beaten and three times as likely to have a partner who had either experienced violence himself as a child or had a mother who had experienced violence.

Finally, there is an emerging body of research making the link being made between gender based violence, unprotected sex and HIV infection (UN 2010). This research suggests that sexual violence against women, including within marriage, places them at a higher risk of HIV infection if the male perpetrator is infected, not only because forced sex is almost always unprotected sex but also because violent sex can result in abrasions which facilitate transmission. Furthermore, physical and emotional abuse, or fear of it, undermines women's ability to negotiate safer sex with intimate partners. There is less research on this link in the context of Viet Nam but the evidence cited here suggests the need to take it seriously

The survey suggested that 63% of the women who suffered from physical or sexual violence knew about the law. Qualitative interviews suggested that many women found the law helpful because it made them more confident to defend themselves and report their case. Some felt that it also sent a signal to men about their behavior. However, very few of those interviewed, whether the women themselves or the health providers and commune leaders, know the contents of the law in any detail. This may explain the ineffective response to cases of violence.

Interviews with medical professionals suggested lack of information of the extent to which intimate partner violence was a problem in their own catchment area (Krantz et al. 2005). There are reconciliation groups at commune and sometimes village level made up of respected community members played a role in mediation, but it is not clear how successful they are. No professional training is required to become a member of such a group, and so it is not too surprising that at times health professionals are found to be ignorant and reluctant to intervene. Counseling services need to be improved and training programs made available to health care personnel, local Women Union staff and reconciliation groups. The health sector needs to take the lead on collaboration.

One route to reducing domestic violence worth exploring is via strengthening women's land rights. Women's ownership of land and/or housing has been found to be associated with reduced domestic violence in a number of contexts. This relationship has not been explored in the Vietnamese context but there is evidence to suggest that access to land rights has strengthened their bargaining power within the family as well as their fall-back option in case of disputes. According to the WB survey cited earlier, around 85% of both men and women agreed that joint title LTCs had enhanced women's position within the family and community. Conversely, joint titles acted as a restraint on authoritarian behavior by husbands. While single title LTCs does not mean that there is no possibility to treat land as joint property, the joint title LTC provides much greater assurance against dispossession in case of conflict. The data also showed higher levels of joint decision making in households with joint LTCs than those with single (88% compared to 64%).

Another point that should be made, but is not as well studied is gender based violence against gays and lesbians. A recent qualitative study found that such violence can have a devastating impact, leading to dropping out of school and even suicide. And that while it takes place mostly in the home, it can also occur in public places like schools and police stations (Anh, et al. 2011)

## 2.11 Male Health Problems: Tobacco and Alcohol

Globally, men tend to bear the burden of ill health related to risky behaviors, and the same is true in Viet Nam, especially in regards to tobacco and alcohol use. According to the Global Adult Tobacco Survey 2010 (WHO), 47.4% of men over age 15 were smokers, compared to only 1.4% of women.

This huge gender gap in smoking rates is not unusual in the East Asia and Pacific region. For example, the data for China in 2006 show 59.5% of men were smokers compared to only 3.7% of women. Similar gaps exist throughout the region: Indonesia (61.7 percent versus 5.2 percent), Lao PDR (64 percent versus 15.3 percent), South Korea (53.3 versus 5.7 percent) and Tonga (62.3 versus 15 percent).

This behavior posed substantial risks to men's health since globally, WHO estimates that half of today's smokers will die from tobacco related causes. A similar gender gap exists in alcohol use, where 5.7% of Vietnamese men are considered heavy drinkers compared to only 0.6% of women (WHO).

These behaviors are influenced by normative values, cultural beliefs about health, and the surrounding environment. For men, smoking and drinking alcohol are commonly viewed as masculine behaviors, and studies show that men and boys feel substantial pressure to accept gender stereotypes that they should be strong and tough. The opposite is true for women. A recent national survey in Viet Nam found that the primary reason women did not use tobacco was the belief that "women shouldn't smoke." Over three quarters of young urban Vietnamese women said that the low female smoking prevalence should be attributed to gender norms (i.e. social disapproval of women who smoke). Only



20% said that the low prevalence was the result of health concerns. (See [http://www.who.int/gender/documents/Gender\\_Tobacco\\_2.pdf](http://www.who.int/gender/documents/Gender_Tobacco_2.pdf)).

In addition, men in Viet Nam lose 2.5 times as many Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) due to injuries as women (Nhung, et al. 2008), in part because of different gender roles but also because of a higher degree of risk taking behavior, for example in driving.

## 2.12 Gender and ageing: Widows overrepresented among the poor

Finally, there is emerging evidence that gender may become relevant in addressing the problems of the elderly. Viet Nam's population structure reveals the current demographic structural changes that the country is undergoing. While for the younger population, males exceed females, there are many more women than men in the older population. The intersection of age and gender appears to have a growing relationship with poverty. At present, only 26% of the elderly are supported by state allowances and retirement pension. However, this translates into 33% of elderly men compared to 19% of elderly women.

When it comes to consumption poverty among the elderly, gender differences do not appear to be very large once marital status and living arrangements are controlled for (Friedman et al, 2003). The main source of income for most elderly – intergenerational family transfers – exhibits few gender differences in the amount of transfers, even though there are at times systematic differences in co-residence and transfer patterns. The issue is more often the control of assets, as older women are less likely to be listed on LTCs.

It is important to note that the lack of gender impact in studies of aging women is the result of controlling for marital status and age. Elderly rural women tend to do the worst among their generation. But when women are worse off, it is to a significant extent due to the fact that they are on average older and thus are more likely to be living alone and/or have exhausted their assets – including their husband's pensions which can disappear upon their passing. However, this is mitigated to some extent by the fact that single elderly are more likely to be taken in by their children.

Many more women appear to be living on their own than men - 67% of single person households are made up of women – and this likelihood increases with age, particularly after 65 (2009 Housing Survey). Many of these women are widows and, as have seen, households headed by widows tended to be among the poorest in the population.

This situation is not unique to Viet Nam in the region, where elderly rural women tend to do the worst among their generation (Long and Pfau 2008, Khan 2001) to a significant extent due to the fact that they are on average older and thus are more likely to be living alone and/or have exhausted their assets. For example, Cambodia, the percentage of women having lost a spouse is double that of men (Knodel and Zimmer 2009). In Indonesia, the difference is dramatic. Fifty-eight percent of elderly women are widowed compared to only 12% of men (Kreager and Schroder-Butterfull, 2009)



In addition, 2009 data suggests that while disability in Viet Nam increases with age for both men and women (as in other countries, WHO and World Bank 2011), it is likely to be higher for women than men in the 60+ age group. The barriers to participating in social life for the elderly directly impact their quality of life, but it also imposes additional costs on their families (Braithwaite and Mont 2009). In fact, in Viet Nam one study showed that having a disabled household member increased the cost of living over 11%. Adjusting for this would raise the poverty rate of households with disabled members significantly. And this is more of an issue for women, since the rate of disability in Viet Nam is 8.5% for women compared to 6.6% for men, with the gap to a significant measure explained by the difference in longevity (Mont and Cuong 2011).

The question of land titles also has important gender implications for the elderly. For many women, their names on LTCs held out the promise of security in old age – either as source of livelihood for children who could support them or as a source of rental income. Thus, even those women who are supported by their children do not feel like a burden on them. And as noted above, significantly less than half of elderly women living in households with LTCs are included on them.

## GENDER AND EMPLOYMENT: ESCAPING POVERTY, CONTRIBUTING TO GROWTH

## 3.1 Introduction

*“International experience suggests that access to stable and gainful employment is a – and perhaps the – key link between economic growth and poverty reduction. Creating more and better employment opportunities is therefore seen as especially important for creating routes of escape from poverty and vulnerability” (Joint Country Assessment 2010)*

If Viet Nam is to consolidate its middle income status in the coming years, it will need to maintain its track record of continued poverty reduction and sustained economic growth. As the opening quote from the Joint Country Assessment points out, employment provides the crucial link between these efforts. Although the country’s dramatic decline in fertility led to a drop in the dependency ratio: from 70 to 2000 to 54 in 2008, the population continued to grow at around 1.3% per annum. An average of 1.06 million people have been added annually to the labor force between 2000 and 2007, bringing the total labor force to 46.7 million (MOLISA/ILO 2007).

The economy must generate jobs for all of these people in order to maintain current rates of employment, but the rate at which GDP growth generates jobs in Viet Nam – the elasticity of employment with respect to economic growth – was just 0.28 between 2004-2008. A one percent rise in GDP increased employment by just 0.28 percent (ILO/MOLISA 2010). This compares with 0.58 in Singapore and Philippines and between 0.32 and 0.47 for Cambodia, Lao PDR, Indonesia and Malaysia. In the absence of a more employment-oriented growth strategy, supported by appropriate patterns of investment and human resource development, the continued expansion of its labor force could lead to increasing levels of unemployment and underemployment.

Nor is the adequate generation of jobs the only challenge. As pointed out by MOLISA (2011), Viet Nam gives high priority to the development of equitable and integrated labor markets as a critical element of its ten year socio-economic development strategy (2011-2020). And, as the opening quote to the chapter also emphasizes, ‘creating more and better employment opportunities’ is essential to the creation of sustained escape routes out of poverty and vulnerability.

As with most low, and many middle income countries, a major challenge in improving the quality of employment in Viet Nam lies in addressing the extent of informal employment in the economy. While data on this has been, until recently, extremely patchy and unreliable, it was always clear that it accounted for a sizeable share of employment. A clearer picture has emerged as a result of recent efforts by the GSO to redesign the LFS to allow for the measurement of informal employment. The LFS divides the economy into three sectors: the formal, the informal and the agricultural sector. The

formal sector is largely made up of public sector employment along with employment in large private enterprises, both domestic and foreign owned. It accounts for about 18% of total employment. The informal sector is made up of 'all private unincorporated enterprises that produce at least some of their goods and services for sale or barter, are not registered and are engaged in non-agricultural activities' (Cling et al. 2010: p. 6). Informal employment, on the other hand, is defined as all employment without social security. It includes most workers in the agricultural and informal sectors but also includes workers in formal enterprises who are on informal contacts. Informal employment thus cuts across all these three sectors of the economy. Current estimates suggest that it accounts for over 70% of total employment and must therefore be regarded as the unacknowledged mainstream of the economy.

As we noted in Chapter 1, the period since the last VGA has been one of considerable macro-economic change, including accession to the WTO, a period of rising commodity prices, the global financial crisis as well as transition to middle income country status. The high levels of labor force participation reported by both men and women in Viet Nam mean that both groups have been directly, but not necessarily uniformly, affected by the impact of these changes on labor market opportunities. In this chapter we draw on the national data sets to track broad trends in the labor market experiences of men and women since the last VGA. We then consider examples of specific groups of workers in both formal and informal employment whose experiences in recent years have particular relevance for future policies for poverty reduction and economic growth.

## **3.2 Tracking gendered impacts of crisis on labor market**

### *3.2.1 Rising rates of labor force participation but increased levels of unemployment and under-employment*

According to previous Labor Force Surveys, there was a steady decline in labor force participation rates between 1997- 2007. This reflected the fact that younger age groups were staying on longer in formal education and older age groups were leaving the labor force earlier. This pattern was disrupted between 2007 and 2009 with evidence of rising labor force participation rates: from 78.4% to 81.0% for men and from 70.5 to 72.3 for women (ILO, 2010; Pierre, 2011). The largest increases occurred among precisely those age groups whose rates had been showing the greatest declines in the earlier period. The rise was greater for the 15-19 year old age group: women in this group reported an increase from 36.4 percent to 43.6 percent compared to 38.1 percent to 43.9 percent for men. The 50+ age group reported a smaller increase from 55.6 percent 58.9 percent (Pierre, 2011).

Of course, not all those who entered the labor force necessarily found work, or as much work as they wanted, and a distinction has to be maintained between the employed, the unemployed and the underemployed in the labor force. Overall, the economic crisis has brought younger and older age groups back into the labor market. While women have had larger increases than men this has been

accompanied by an increase in both unemployment and underemployment. Unemployment rates rose between 2007 and 2009 from 1.9% to 2.5% for men and from 2.0% to 2.7% for women (ILO 2010). There was also an increase in under-employment rates<sup>1</sup> from 4.8% to 6.8%. About 25% of workers held more than one job in 2009 compared to just 17.6% in 2007.

### *3.2.2 Women moved out of agriculture more slowly than men*

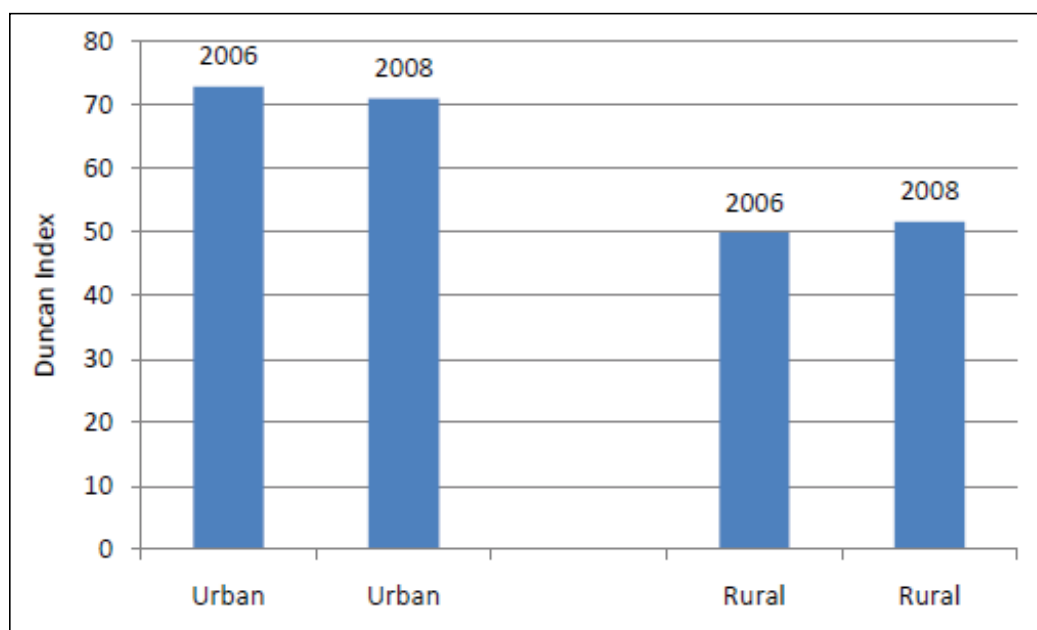
The crisis did not reverse the secular shift in employment out of agriculture nor did it disrupt the gender-stratified nature of this shift. Women moved out of agriculture more slowly than men: male employment in agriculture declined from 47.2% in 2007 to 45.2% in 2009 while female employment declined from 51.5% to 50%. This was accompanied by an increase in employment in industry from 24.5% to 26.4% for men and from 16.1% to 17.0% for women. The share of male employment in services remained constant (at 28.2%) but increased slightly from 32.4% to 33.1% for women. Agriculture thus continued to account for a major proportion of male employment and an even greater proportion of female.

Estimates of the Duncan index, a commonly used measure of job segregation, suggest that there has been little change in the gender-specific concentration of employment by sector between 2006 and 2008 (Rodgers and Menon, 2010). The Duncan Index shows the percentage of all female workers who would have to switch industries in order to equalize the employment distributions between men and women. As the figure below shows, it has remained nearly unchanged at over 70 for urban areas and increased slightly from 49.9 to 51.7 in rural areas. These estimates suggest that around 70% of women would have to switch sectors in order to equalize job distribution with men in urban areas while in rural areas, around half would have to switch. The lower levels of gender segregation in rural areas reflect the higher levels of concentration of both men and women in agriculture.

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<sup>1</sup> The percentage of the employed population working less than 35 hours a week and ready to work longer hours.

**Figure 3.1 -- Duncan Index of Industrial Segregation, Viet Nam**



Source: Rodgers and Menon 2010

A more detailed breakdown of labor force participation illuminates the pattern of gender segregation by sub-sector outside agriculture. In rural areas, men are largely found in transport and communications and evenly distributed between retail sales, transport and communications and business and financial services while women are largely found in manufacturing (textiles, garments, wood/paper and food/beverages), in retail/wholesale trades and in education/cultural services. In urban areas, men are largely in transport and communications, business and financial services and education, health and cultural services. Women are more likely than men to be in trades, mainly retail trades, hotel/restaurants, education, health and cultural services and business and financial services.

### 3.2.3 *Rising rates of vulnerable employment, deteriorating quality of work*

While trends in the quality of employment over the period under consideration appear to be mixed, the overall picture is one of deterioration, more for women than for men. A number of different measures of quality are used. One measure relates to the formality of employment. A second focuses on employment status, distinguishing between waged/salaried employment, self-employment and unpaid family work. Self-employment can be further sub-divided into employer status and own-account work<sup>2</sup>. Own-account work and unpaid family labor are taken by the ILO to constitute 'vulnerable employment'. While certain forms of waged work, particularly daily waged labor, would also qualify for inclusion in this category, it is a more heterogeneous category. By contrast, it can generally be assumed that most

<sup>2</sup> Membership of producer co-operatives would also count but accounts for a minuscule proportion of workers in Viet Nam

forms of own account and unpaid family work are characterized by low productivity and low earnings, with women in unpaid family work least likely to have any control over earnings. Other measures of quality relate to returns to, and security of, employment, skills and occupational status.

**Table 3.1 -- Informal sector employment**

	2007			2009		
	All	Men	Women	All	Men	Women
Agricultural employment	50.1	47.9	52.4	47.6	45.4	50.0
Informal sector employment	27.7	28.2	27.1	24.4	25.1	23.7
Formal sector employment	22.2	23.9	20.5	27.9	29.5	26.3

*Source: Pierre. 2011*

The national data suggest that the share of formal employment increased for both men and women between 2007 and 2009 (Pierre, Table 9). This was primarily because of the continued decline in agricultural employment. However, other indicators show that the decline in one form of vulnerable employment for women, own account work, has been offset by an increase in a possibly even more vulnerable form of employment, unpaid family work<sup>3</sup>. According to LFS estimates, 69% of women were vulnerably employed in 2009 compared to only 54.4% of men (ILO 2010).

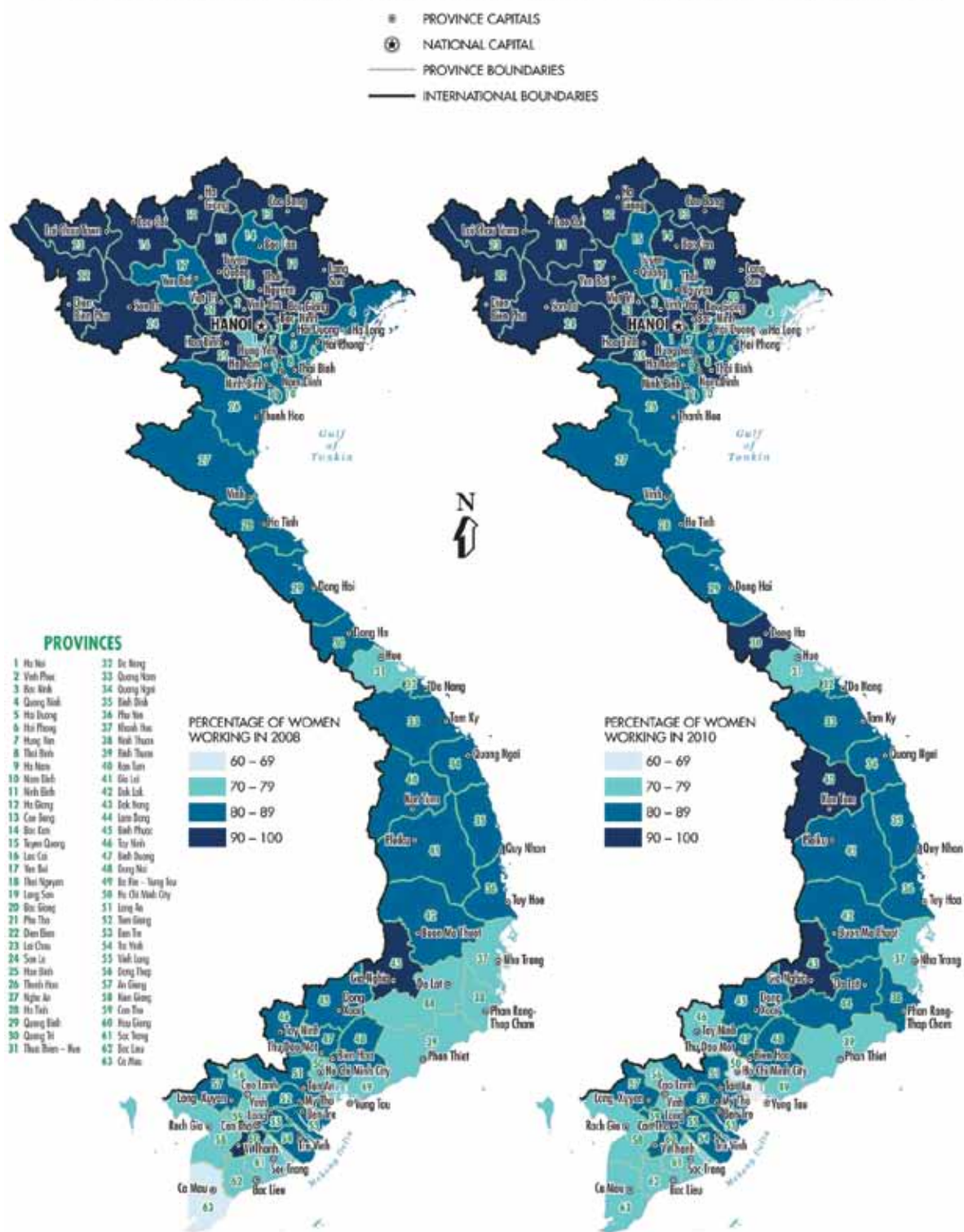
As Figure 3.2 and 3.3 show, important shifts can occur between types of employment, and some of these shifts have regional characteristics. For example the rate of employment for women was higher in the north (Figure 3.2) both before and after the economic crisis hit. But the impact on wage employment was much more pronounced in the north. Women kept working more there, after the economic crisis, but less so in wage employment. While women in the south were able to increase their wage employment.

<sup>3</sup> Nguyen et al (2010) suggest that the shift between own-account work and unpaid family work may be due to misallocation of women between the two, very similar, categories.



Figure 3.2 -- Women's Employment Rate

VIETNAM  
WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT RATE, AGES 18-55, BY PROVINCE IN 2008 AND 2010

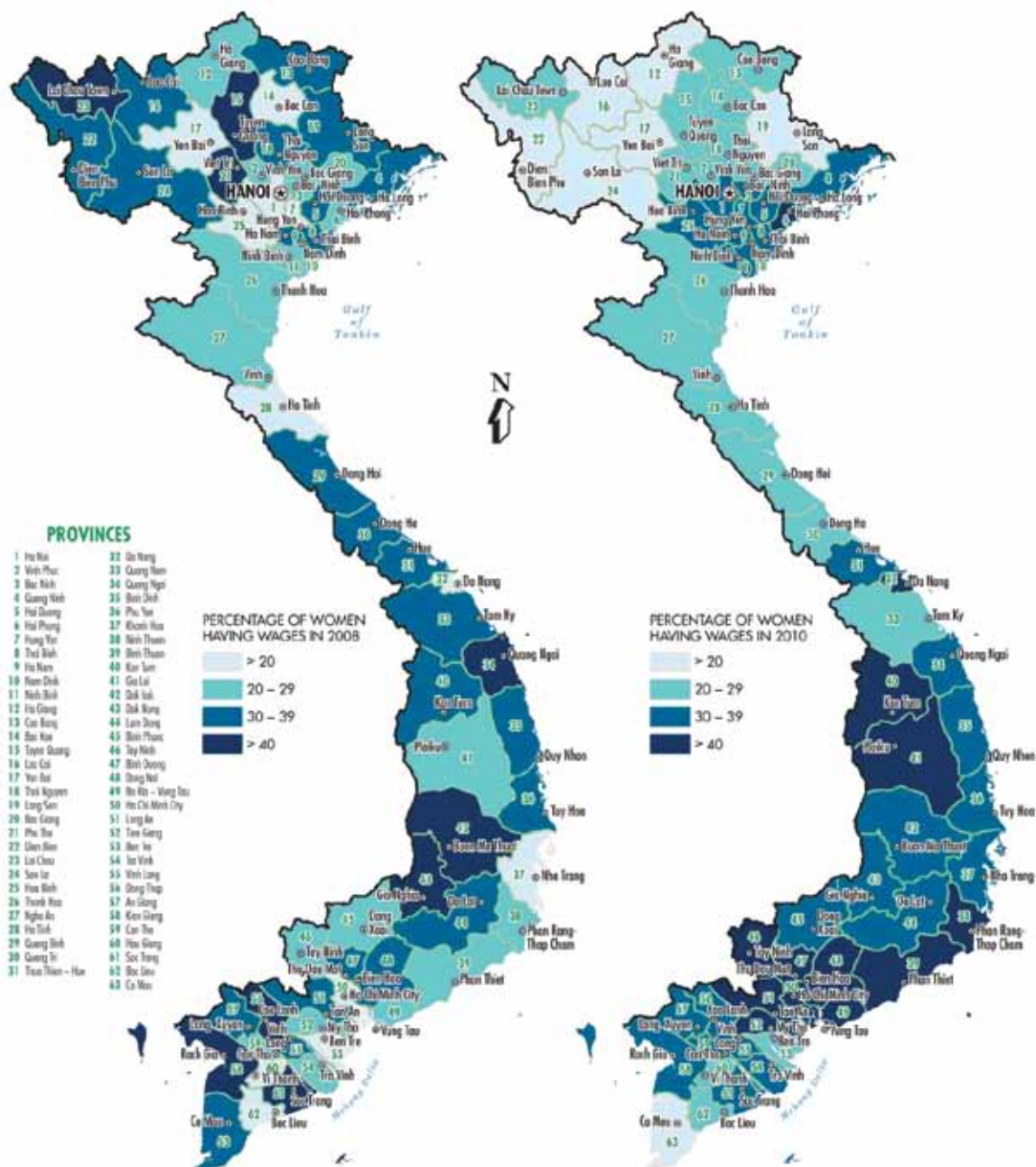


This map was produced by the Map Design Unit of The World Bank. The boundaries, colors, denominations and any other information shown on this map do not imply, on the part of The World Bank Group, any judgment on the legal status of any territory, or any endorsement or acceptance of such boundaries.

Figure 3.3 -- Women's Wage Employment Rate

VIETNAM  
WOMEN'S WAGE EMPLOYMENT RATE, AGES 18-55, BY PROVINCE IN 2008 AND 2010

- ⊙ PROVINCE CAPITALS
- ⊕ NATIONAL CAPITAL
- PROVINCE BOUNDARIES
- INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARIES



The map was produced by the Map Design Unit of the World Bank. The boundaries, colors, denominations and any other information shown on this map do not imply, on the part of the World Bank Group, any judgment on the legal status of any territory or any endorsement or acceptance of such boundaries.

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Digging into the numbers we see that self employment continues to account for the largest share of the work force for both men and women but declined between 2007 and 2009 from 52.2% to 49% for men and from 60.9% to 50.2% for women. For women, this was accompanied by a decline in percentage of own-account work from 58% to 46.9% and an increase in wage/salaried work from 25% to 27.5% and a considerable increase in unpaid family work from 13.9% to 22.2%. Among men, on the other hand, the decline in overall levels of self employment was accompanied by a small increase in employer status (from 3.8% to 6.3%), a decline in own-account work from 48.1% to 42.6% and an increase in wage/salaried employment from 35.8% to 38.9.

**Table 3.2 -- Hourly wage by employment status (2009)**

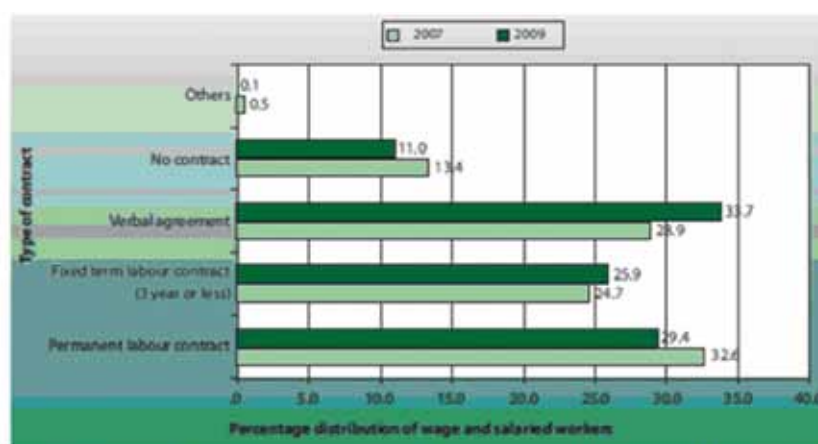
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Median	Frequency
Employer	22.2	57.6	13.9	2273176
Self-account worker	9.1	35.8	6.1	21156565
Wage worker	11.2	10.1	8.8	15956925
Member of cooperative	6.7	4.8	6.9	51772.2
Others	5.9	7.7	5.2	35969.1
Total	10.7	30.4	7.4	39474407

*Source: (LFS, 2009)*

While wage workers report higher hourly wages than self-employed workers, the shift into waged employment was accompanied by deteriorating security in waged work. Data from the LFS report a decline in permanent contracts and an increase in fixed term contracts and verbal agreements (ILO 2010, Figure 5). Women in waged work appear to be slightly better off than men in that a third reported having a permanent contract compared to a quarter of employed men. In addition, about 10% of women and 12% of men were working without any type of contract or agreement in 2009 but this represented a small decline since 2007.



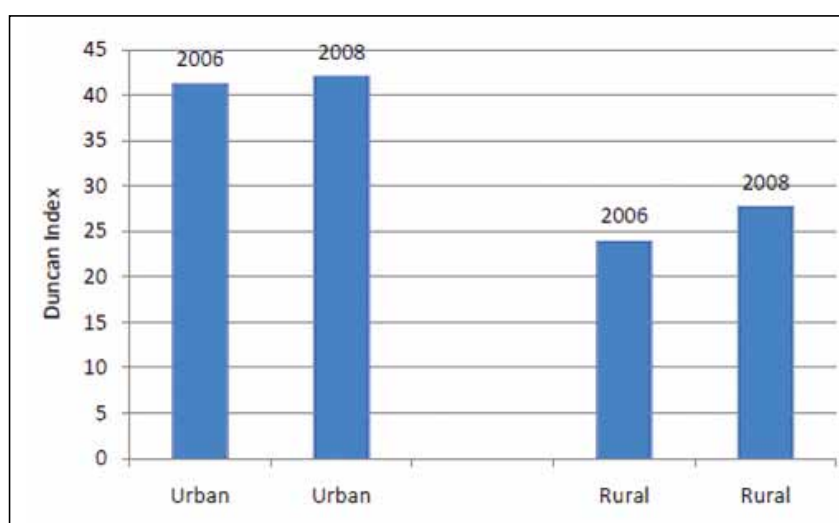
**Figure 3.4 -- Viet Nam Employment Trends 2010**



Source: GSO 2007 and 2009 Labour Force Surveys, author's calculations based on adjusted sample weights for 2007.  
 Note: Numbers may not sum precisely to totals due to rounding.

The proportion of skilled female workers is only half that of skilled male workers and that this disparity increased slightly between 2002 and 2006 (Rodgers and Menon 2010). As far as occupational status is concerned, men hold a disproportionate share of administrative and managerial jobs in both urban and rural sectors. As discussed below, these are better paid jobs and generally involve leadership responsibilities. The Duncan Index for occupational distribution by gender between 2006 and 2008 suggests some increase in segregation, fairly small in the urban sector (from 41.3 to 42.1), more substantial in the rural sector (from 24.0 to 27.8). As with the gender distribution of employment by sector, the lower degree of occupational segregation by gender in rural areas reflects the high levels of concentration of both men and women in agricultural occupations in the rural economy. The occupational Duncan Indices is smaller than those calculated for sectoral distribution, suggesting that there is a greater concentration of women by sector than by occupation.

**Figure 3.5 -- Duncan Index of Occupational Segregation, Viet Nam**



Source: Rodgers and Menon, 2010

Before concluding this section, however, it is important to note that occupational segregation – and differences by gender in fields of study – is by no means unique to Viet Nam. In fact, it represents a broader pattern found throughout the region. As explained in the forthcoming East Asian and Pacific companion piece to the World Development Report on Gender, men and women sort into different occupations, industries, fields of study, and contractual relationships worldwide. Throughout the region women are overrepresented in unpaid family labor and in the informal sector and are more likely to be found in various occupations and industries (WB Country Gender Assessments, various; UNESCAP 2003).

### *3.2.4 A halt in the decline in the gender wage gap*

The overall gender wage gap has been declining since 1990s so that it is now 65% of its value in 1992-93 (Liu, 2004). According to LFS data, women were paid an overall average of 75% of men's wage in 2009. However, the decline came to a halt between 2006 and 2008 (Pierre, 2011, Table 24), the last two years for which data are available. The causal mechanisms that led to this halt are not clear but it suggests a further example of the ways in which women lost ground relative to men during the crisis.

The LFS shows that the gender wage gap varied considerably across occupations (see below). The gap in monthly wages was smaller in higher level occupations – indeed women earned more than men in a number of highly skilled categories - but these occupations generally account for a very small percentage of the labor force. It was much larger in less skilled occupations where the majority of the work force is concentrated: 80% for unskilled workers in 2007 declining to 75% in 2009. The 2008 VHLSS data confirms this pattern. Mean hourly wages are highest in public sector employment followed by employment in joint ventures with foreign companies and state owned enterprises. They are lowest in private enterprise. As might be expected, they are also highest in higher skilled administrative, managerial and professional occupations and lowest among unskilled workers. The ratio of female to male wages is also higher in the administrative, managerial and professional occupations and in services. However, the ratio is lower among skilled manual workers compared to unskilled workers.

Various factors are likely to contribute to gender disparities in earnings. One is education. Not only do real wages rise with education for both men and women, particularly for those with at least upper secondary schooling, but it also leads to above average female-male wage ratios in both the urban and rural sectors. At the other extreme, women with primary or no education have the lowest relative wages.

Differences in monthly earnings may also reflect differences in amount of time spent in paid work. This is only partly supported by LFS data, which show that the gender gap in monthly wages is very loosely related to the gender gaps in weekly hours worked. The more skilled occupations in which women put in longer hours than men are generally the ones in which women earn more than men

(see Table 23 in Pierre, 2011). However, in other occupations, particularly those which account for the bulk of female labor, very small differences in working hours are accompanied by much larger gaps in gender earnings. Clearly, differences in weekly hours worked is not sufficient to explain gender differentials in earnings. One impact of the crisis appears to have a decline in the ratio of female to male hours worked: using LFS 2007 and 2009 data, Pierre shows that the ratio of weekly hours of work by women to men fell slightly from 95.8% to 94.3%. They fell from 96.7% to 93.8% in the unskilled worker category.

**Table 3.3 -- Occupational gender gaps (2007 and 2009)**

Occupation	Gender gap in weekly hours		Gender gap in monthly pay	
	2007	2009	2007	2009
Leaders in all fields	101.0	96.9	120.6	84.3
Top-level professionals	96.7	96.8	83.7	82.6
Mid-level professionals	98.8	96.6	94.4	94.2
Officers	102.4	108.4	103.8	116.1
Skilled workers in personal services, security protection and sales	98.5	98.1	77.6	72.5
Skilled workers in agriculture, sylviculture, and aquaculture	90.0	90.2	67.7	64.7
Skilled handicraftsmen and other relating skilled manual workers	99.5	92.5	69.4	60.4
Assemblers and machine operators	102.7	101.7	65.3	65.0
Unskilled workers	96.7	93.8	80.0	75.2
Total	95.8	94.3	73.7	75.1

*Source: (LFS, 2007 and 2009)*

*Note: ratio of women's number of hours by men's; ratio of women's monthly wage by men's.*



### 3.2.5 *Continued asymmetry in gender distribution of unpaid work*

Regardless of these various shifts and reversals in the gender distribution of labor force participation, occupations, skills and earnings, inequalities in the gender distribution of unpaid work have remained remarkably unchanged. Data from the 2008 VHLSS suggest that men worked an average of 38 weeks a year while women worked 37. However, 44% of men did not contribute to housework at all compared to just 21% of women. The patterns show little change compared to the 2004 and 2006 VHLSS and are also roughly similar in rural and urban areas.

Of those that had contributed, men worked an average of 1.5 hours per day while women contributed 2.2 hours.

These gender differences in contributions to housework start early in life. While 85% of boys in the 6-10 groups had not contributed to housework compared to 80% of girls, the differences had widened to 58% and 41% in the 11-14 age group. The survey definition of housework excludes child care which is largely performed by women and hence the measures documented above are likely to be under-estimates. The continued high percent of men across age groups who perform no housework at all, and the relatively few hours of housework reported by those men who do some housework, indicate the persistence of long-standing norms that relegate this unvalued work to women and constrain their capacity to participate in public life.

The 2006 VGA noted that traditional attitudes and behaviors position women as care givers within Vietnamese society. The government recognizes the role of women in the home through awards and certificates, but does not recognize or encourage men's contributions. Under the Labor Code of 2002 and associated regulations, leave to care for a newborn baby or a sick child is only available to mothers. The state, in other words, has done little to offset the constraints imposed on women by traditional norms.

### **3.3 The challenge of informality in the transition to middle income status**

The previous section testifies to the significance of gender in structuring labor market outcomes during a period of macro-economic instability in Viet Nam. It suggests women were more likely than men to return to the labor market in the wake of economic crisis but that they experienced higher rates of unemployment than men, were more likely to find jobs in vulnerable forms of employment and saw a halt in the decline in the gender wage gap that had been occurring since the 1990s. Gender, along with other factors, such as education, ethnicity and assets, is equally likely to determine how different groups of workers are likely to fare in its transition to middle income status.

As we noted at the start of this chapter, the provision of stable and gainful employment is essential if economic growth rates are to be translated into poverty reduction. The extent and persistence of informal employment is thus one of the challenges that Viet Nam faces if it is to consolidate its status as a middle income country. The developmental significance of the informal economy is that it

contributes very little to the tax revenue of the country, that it falls outside the reach of legal regulation and the social security system, and that it is largely characterized by low productivity and poor working conditions (Rand and Tom, 2010). Conversely, the formalization of the small and medium enterprises that make up the bulk of the informal sector has been found to not only improve access to credit and profitability but also security of employment for their waged workforce. Informality thus has a bearing not only on the quantity of employment in the overall economy but also the quality.

As this chapter reports, informal employment still makes up the bulk of employment in Viet Nam despite some decline in recent years. Like most low income and a number of middle income countries, it cannot be considered a residual element of the overall economy but rather its hitherto undocumented mainstream. Studies have stressed the heterogeneity of informal employment so that different groups of informal workers are likely to make very different contributions to future growth in Viet Nam and to need very different kinds of policy support. In the rest of this chapter, we discuss examples of different categories of male and female workers in order to examine some of the policy implications that they present. These include workers in the export sector, low wage workers, formal and informal entrepreneurs, migrant workers, ethnic minorities and, an emerging challenge, workers affected by climate change.

### *3.3.1 Waged employment runs on a continuum from informal to formal*

Wage workers form a very small proportion of the informally employed: they represent 7% of the workforce and 24% of the informal sector labour force. However, the ranks of informal wage workers in the economy are swelled by the large number of workers without formal contracts and social benefits working for formal enterprises. Informal employment makes up around 17% of employment in foreign enterprises, 53% in domestic enterprises and 48% in formal household-based enterprises.

Wage workers can thus be located on a continuum from formal (permanent workers with full benefits and social insurance) to quasi-formal (no written contracts, partial benefits) to informal (temporary workers)<sup>4</sup>. We focus here on two groups of waged workers who illustrate the different ways in which gender positions women in relation to local and global labour market forces and the challenge this presents for attempts to improve their position in the labour market.

### *3.3.2 Export-oriented wage employment is exposed to global fluctuations*

Workers in the export-oriented sector have made the most direct contributions to GNP as a result of Viet Nam's increasing integration into the global economy. Economic growth has been largely driven by export manufacturing, a sector with a largely female workforce. This form of employment has

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<sup>4</sup> An earlier study by Kabeer and Van Anh showed that only 77% of women workers in privately owned garment manufacturing units had written contracts, compared to 99% of those working in state owned garment enterprises, and those that did, reported far less favourable contracts to those pertaining in the state sector

expanded further with accession to the WTO. As a recent UNIFEM study found, the opening up of new industrial parks and factories on previously agricultural land has displaced a great deal of farm labour but also generated new forms of employment in manufacturing. Within agriculture, there has been a shift in some provinces out of rice cultivation and small livestock to out-of-season fruits, flower cultivation and large scale livestock. There has also been a growth in aquaculture.

The study found that women, particularly those in the younger age groups as well migrant workers, enjoyed significant new opportunities in export factories, industrial parks and food and seafood processing plants. Older women are found in supporting industry jobs such as industrial cleaning and cooking in factories or in small-scale trading and services, selling breakfast to workers, opening restaurants, tailoring, rental accommodation and so on. Men have mainly benefited from new jobs in agriculture, particularly in aquaculture.

Studies of export factories and industrial parks demonstrate that women workers in the labour-intensive export factories tend to be worse off than other workers in the formal sectors because they are employed as a cheap and flexible labour force and hired on less favourable terms (Nguanbanchong, 2010). They work longer hours, health and safety conditions tend to be poorer than other formal sector enterprises, many do not have any social insurance and many are employed on a casual basis (UNIFEM). While this sector has provided employment opportunities to less educated women, there is little scope for skills upgrading and technical training that would allow these women to move up the occupational hierarchy.

Analysis of the 2008 VHLSS suggests that women's wages relative to men in manufacturing was far below the overall industry level of 90: in urban areas it amounted to just 58% of men's wages: 'These findings suggest that, especially in urban areas, manufacturing sector employers have been squeezing women's wages relative to men's wages in order to maintain their competitive edge in global markets' (Rodgers and Menon, 2011). This is supported by evidence that of a sample of 38 developing and transition economies in 2008, Viet Nam had the fourth lowest labour costs at \$0.38 an hour with only Bangladesh, Cambodia and Pakistan reporting lower labour cost in clothing.

The recent global crisis hit these sections of the work force harder than others because of their greater exposure to global market forces. Studies by MOLISA reported a direct negative impact, 'especially on foreign-invested enterprises, private domestic enterprises and export-oriented enterprises in such industries as textile and garment, leather and footwear, construction and transportation' (ILO, 2010b: p. 32). Women workers dominate in a number of the industries that were most at risk. According to 2004 figures, the ratio of female to male workers in textile and garments is 2.85; 2.30 in electronics; 1.80 in leather and footwear. Women also outnumber men in the tourism industry (2.99) (Nguanbanchong, 2010). However, men outnumbered women in construction and the automobile industry.

Estimates suggest that 67,000 workers were retrenched in 2008, of which 26% were female. 107,000 lost their jobs in the first half of 2009, of which 31% were women. Women workers in export manufacturing were badly affected by the crisis. Garment and textile enterprises experienced a decline in orders from 2008. Others received lower prices per unit. This had led to the dismissal of many thousands of workers and added to the difficulties of those seeking work. Evidence from the bigger cities suggested that most of the foreign invested firms, particularly the labor intensive ones, had been badly affected. The decline in orders led many firms to seek to cut costs. Newly employed workers were most vulnerable to job losses because enterprises simply announced their decision not to renew current short term or trial labor contracts. Some workers reported that since late 2008 only short term contracts were on offer. In the bigger cities, there appeared to be a trend for firms to look for higher skilled workers to replace lower skilled ones as tasks that could be done by the latter were being out-sourced to smaller units where lower wages could be paid .

**Table 3.4 -- Share of Employment by Gender by Industry**

Selected Industries at risk	Viet Nam (VLSS 2004)		
	Pct. Share of total employed by sex		W/M
	Men	Women	
Textiles and Garments	0.28	0.80	2.85
Electronics and Telecom	0.14	0.15	1.07
Footwear and Leather Products	0.55	1.00	1.80
Tourism (hotels and restaurants)	1.69	5.08	2.99
Auto (plants, parts...)	1.36	0.20	0.22
Construction	9.37	0.94	0.10

*Source: Rodgers and Menon 2010*

While women made up a smaller percentage than men of retrenched workers, those in work suffered the deterioration in quality of working conditions noted in the national data. Some enterprises were able to keep their workforces stable using labor rotation, reduction in working hours, work shifts and increased leave. Others used more questionable practices such as keeping their workers underemployed, not paying for leave or paying for only part of it, imposing unpaid leave to pressure workers to quit and thus avoid layoff allowance.

Women workers in the export sector are vulnerable to global market fluctuations both because of their direct exposure to these forces and because they are employed on an informal basis. They are also likely to be vulnerable in Viet Nam's transition to middle income status. As the Joint Country Assessment (2010) has argued, if Viet Nam is going to consolidate its position as a middle income country, it will have to move from the 'low road' to economic growth based on low-paid and unskilled labour it has been pursuing so far to the high road based on a skilled and formalised labour force.

At the same time, women workers have benefited considerably from new opportunities in the export industries, even if the jobs were not of high quality and did not generate skills that could be transferred easily across sectors. As a result, while recognizing the limits of the low wage export strategy, Kabeer, et al (2005) expressed concern about the future: "Sustaining future growth rates will increasingly depend on improving skills and technology and moving into higher value added products and stages of production. However, evidence from East Asia and parts of Latin America suggest that moving into more capital and skill intensive industries is frequently associated with a 'de-feminisation' of the labour force as high skilled men replace low skilled women' (p. 11)<sup>5</sup>.

### 3.3.3 *Low wage earners: poverty and under-employment*

Although a great deal of international attention has been on wages and working conditions in large domestic or foreign owned export-oriented enterprises, in fact, lower wages and far worse working conditions prevail in small informal family-run enterprises and for those working as casual labor in urban and rural areas (Mekong Economics, 2004). One way to identify the most disadvantaged wage workers is to focus on those who earn less than the per capita income poverty line<sup>6</sup> in their main job (Pierre, 2011).

These workers are more likely than other wage workers to live in households below the poverty line: around 24% compared to 7.5% in 2008. They are disproportionately drawn from the agricultural sector: 22% of wage workers in agriculture were in this category compared to 5-7% in other sectors. They are also most likely to be drawn from the 10-12% of wage workers who are working without any contracts: as a UNIFEM study noted, the poorest groups among the economically active in rural areas are wage workers, 'but these jobs are seasonal, insecure and their income is very low' (p. 36). Their main problem is consequently under-employment. Most hold more than one job.

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<sup>5</sup> This may have started to happen. Much of FDI had been concentrated in export-oriented manufacturing and telecommunications up to 2006 but has since been shifting into real estate and hotels. This suggests a shift in the gender composition of the demand for labor in the dynamic sectors of the economy which is likely to favor male workers at the expense of female. As McArty et al (2009) pointed out, women dominate the work force in much of export-oriented manufacturing, they have a significant role in hotels but men dominate in construction. In all sectors, there is a higher proportion of unskilled female than male workers.

<sup>6</sup> This was 290 thousand VND for rural areas and 370 thousand VND for urban areas in 2008.



The share of these workers increased between 2006 and 2008 - from 5.2% to 6.4% of male workers and from 8.5% to 11.8% of female - suggesting yet another route through which the economic crisis had gender-specific effects. The UNIFEM study identified some of the characteristics of women workers most likely to fall into this category: women with little or no education and few skills, migrant women, older women and women with disabilities or long term illness. Many of these women are landless or lost their land to industrial parks and urbanization. Lack of capital and business know-how explains why they tend to be found in waged labor. They are least able to access the opportunities generated by Viet Nam's integration into the informal economy. Many are also unable to take advantage of targeted training or employment schemes intended for the poor.

While low wage earners were not directly affected by the global financial crisis in the way that workers in the export sector were, they still suffered from its ramifications. This was evident in a study of casual day laborers working in five 'mobile' markets in Hanoi. Women made up around 30-40% of the total. These were mostly older men and women from nearby rural areas who had no land, had not been able to find work in their villages and were not qualified to work in industrial zones. They came into urban areas in search of work and had been doing so for a while although some of the young workers saw this work as a means of earning enough to pay for vocational training or for travelling further afield in search of more stable employment. While men tend to be employed on construction, women are mainly hired to do cleaning and housework (Phuong, nd). As Table 3.5 below shows, most of them earned less than the per capita income poverty line.

Despite their distance from global markets, these workers were also affected by the downturn in the economy. There was reduced availability of employment in 2008, partly because of rising prices of materials, rising cost of living and reduced levels of consumption. At the same time, the supply of mobile laborers seeking jobs increased: causes included loss of farm revenue because of unstable commodity prices and severe flooding; loss of land to industrial parks and entertainment centers; poor returns to fishing; and women moving from scrap dealing to wage employment in order to earn cash. The construction workers, mainly men, were worst hit by the crisis. According to the First RIA Survey 2009, their net income had decreased compared to the previous year, primarily because of a reduction in average working days per month. Those who had worked 20 days in the month in 2007 worked only 10 days in late 2008. Competition for fewer jobs meant that many more men were willing to accept domestic work while many more women took up 'heavier' work.



Table 3.5 -- Pay for work over the twelve months to April 2009 (Vietnam dong)

	February 2008	January 2009	February 2009
Construction work:	(VND/day)	(VND/day)	
Major mason	80 000–100 000	100 000–120 000	not available yet
Supporting mason	50 000–60 000	65 000–85 000	not available yet
Digging	40 000–50 000 VND/m <sup>3</sup>	60 000–70 000 VND/m <sup>3</sup>	not available yet
Loading and unloading goods by hand/carrying	30 000 VND/ton	35 000 VND/day	little work
Transportation	100 000 VND/day	150 000 VND/day	little work

The rates above are similar regardless of gender.

Low wage workers are quintessentially workers in the informal economy who have little or no access to formal social security. They survive from what they are able to earn on a daily basis and rely largely on family or community networks to tide them through bad times. In a period of generalized insecurity, as with the last economic crisis, such networks come under considerable strain. It is these workers that are most in need of public forms of social protection that can reinforce their informal networks. Most of them are unlikely to have benefited from the unemployment insurance introduced by the state in the aftermath of the economic crisis since it was intended only for workers who at least a one year contract with a company (McCarthy et al 2009). Some of them may have benefited from the public sector investment package intended to stimulate the economy but as this was largely focused on the construction industry, they are most likely to have been men. The sectors in which women are employed as wage workers received far less support. These workers could also benefit from better access to the National Targeted Poverty Programs. However, such measures, however inclusive, will not help them to grow out of poverty. In the longer run, sustainable poverty reduction requires employment-centered economic growth which creates a buoyant labor market with opportunities for all sections of the workforce.

### 3.3.4 Self employment: formal and informal

Self-employment, as we saw, accounts for around half of the working population in Viet Nam. Much of it is found in small and medium enterprises in the informal sector (Cling et al, 2010). While men still make up the majority of the self-employed category, women manage around 30% of the 3 million or so household businesses and 24% of 113, 352 incorporated enterprises (2005 figures). Welter et al (ref) argue that female owned enterprises are of special significance in transition and developing countries because they tend to employ other women more frequently, help reduce gender discrimination in the wage labor market and possibly reduce trafficking by expanding economic opportunities for women.

Along with farmers, informal sector workers generally have lower levels of education than workers in the formal sector while their average income level (1.1 million VND a month) is lower than all other sectors except agriculture. However, informal enterprises are also highly heterogeneous, with many low income earners and a few successful entrepreneurs. For instance, the average income in informal household enterprises in Hanoi was 2,365,000 VND per month while the median was just 1,500,000. In HCMC, the equivalent figures were 2,156,000 and 1,371,000. This suggests that in both cities the higher incomes of a few of the enterprises are raising average levels of income considerably higher than median levels (Cling et al. 2010). Among self employed workers, LFS 2009 reports that own account workers earn 9.1 thousand VND per hour, the most poorly remunerated in the paid work category, while employers earn 22.2 thousand.

Attempts to capture the heterogeneity of the informal sector tend to distinguish between businesses that are oriented to survival needs and those oriented to profit and accumulation. For example, according to Cling et al, around 39% of informal household businesses in Hanoi and HCM fall into the former category while the rest were divided into 'resourceful' (51%) and professional (10%) businesses. Rand and Torm (ref) have shown that becoming officially registered leads to an increase in enterprise profits, despite the one-off costs of registration and the on-going need to pay taxes. Other factors which increased profits were firm size, established property rights, access to good infrastructure and dedicated work facilities. The frequency of inspections reduced profit, suggesting they imposed significant costs on firms. Registration also led to an increase in investments and access to credit but had little impact on business networks or size of the customer base. Finally, the impact of registration was larger in urban areas.

This suggests a strong rationale for encouraging businesses to become officially registered. There is an additional gender rationale for this conclusion. One finding that is emerging from current studies is that women fare far worse than men at the informal end of the enterprise spectrum, where they appear to be far more survival-oriented than men, but as well - and even better - than men at the formal end where both are oriented to profit and accumulation.

### *3.3.5 Women lose out in informal sector enterprise*

Although women operate many non-agricultural household businesses they tend to be less developed; they are less likely to have licenses, employ workers or operate out of permanent structures. Data from the VHLSS 2008, based on a sample of 2569 such businesses show that only 12% of female enterprises in urban areas had paid workers compared to 25% of male. The equivalent figures were 4% and 15% in rural areas. Both were equally like to operate from home but of the rest, women were more likely to operate in markets while men were more likely to operate in permanent shops/sites in urban areas and in non-permanent sites in rural. Finally, male operated businesses reported higher monthly revenue than female: 14, 728 VND compared to 6923 VND in urban areas and 8722 VND and 2672 VND respectively in rural.

One important point to note is that median earnings are substantially lower than mean earnings for both men and women. This echoes the earlier point that relatively few household enterprises bring in large amounts of revenue, while most enterprises have a more modest revenue stream.

More detailed analysis of informal household businesses (IHBs) in Hanoi and HCMC was carried out by Cling et al. using 2009 LFS. They found precarious conditions, atomized and limited entrepreneurial dynamics, long working hours, few written contracts and little access to public services. The average size of informal formal household businesses was 1.5 workers, including the head. The average size of formal household businesses was 2.3 in Hanoi and 2.6 in HCMC. Levels of education were below the average in Viet Nam. Women make up around half of the employment in IHBs in Hanoi and around 56% in HCMC. Men earned nearly 50% more than women in IHBs, despite no significant differences in working hours, education and seniority. Interestingly, migrants represent only 6% of workers in IHBs in Hanoi and 17 in HCMC.

An important point coming out of this study is that IHBs are not integrated into the formal economy: purchases from and sales to formal businesses are marginal. Their main markets are within the informal sector and their main competition is with each other. However this may reflect the fact that 'craft villages' which are more integrated into the formal economy, particularly near Hanoi, were not included in the sample.

FHBs are generally larger in terms of monthly value-added than IHBs and their average labor productivity is higher. Lack of premises is a major constraint preventing expansion of these enterprises. About 50% work from home and 40% have no premises. Their capital is mainly made up of land and premises along with equipment. Much of the equipment is bought second-hand and is very old. Very few invest beyond the point of starting up and very few apply for credit – although it is not clear whether this is a choice or reflects difficulties of access. Very few have access to banks while forms of microfinance adapted to household businesses are rare in Viet Nam.

Corruption does not appear to be a major problem for IHBs. Their main problems with public authorities relates to compliance with public regulations and business location. Strikingly, FHBs are far more likely than IHBs to make complaints or express need for assistance. Finally, IHBs are less optimistic about their prospects than FHBs. This is particularly true of those who took up household businesses because they could not find wage work elsewhere.

Medium term projections suggest that informal sector employment is unlikely to decline in coming years. While the crisis appears to have led to growth in informal sector employment, it was less than expected. There was a slowdown in working hours from 43.9 to 42.3 a week while part time work increased from 21% in 2007 to 27% in 2009. Multi activity rate increased from 18 to 25%. However the 2009 LFS survey was carried out when economy was already beginning to recover so may not have captured full impact.

**Table 3.6 -- Characteristics of Male-Operated and Female – Operated Non-agricultural Household Business.**

	Urban Areas			Rural Areas		
	Male-operated	Female-operated	Total	Male-operated	Female-operated	Total
(No. of businesses)	572	861	1,433	1,116	1,453	2,569
<b>% with business license</b>	40.9	32.8	36.1	22.6	18.8	20.5
<b>Number of laborers (%)</b>						
1 only	54.3	68.9	63.0	57.9	74.9	67.5
2-3	34.1	25.0	28.7	33.9	23.1	27.8
4-5	5.4	3.1	4.0	4.3	1.4	2.7
6-10	3.3	1.7	2.3	2.7	0.4	1.4
11-36	2.9	1.3	2.0	1.2	0.2	0.7
<b>Average number of laborers</b>	2.4	1.7	2.0	1.9	1.4	1.6
<b>% with paid laborer</b>	25.3	12.0	17.4	15.0	3.9	8.8
<b>Place of business activities (%)</b>						
Home	51.0	51.7	51.4	58.2	57.7	57.9
Industrial zone/trade center	0.7	0.5	0.6	0.3	0.3	0.3
Markets	8.6	23.2	17.3	6.9	24.0	16.6
Other shops/permanent places	22.3	16.0	18.5	13.6	8.6	10.8
Non-permanent place	17.5	8.7	12.2	21.1	9.4	14.5
<b>Average number of months in operation</b>	11.2	11.4	11.3	9.7	10.1	9.9
<b>Monthly revenue (VND in thousands)</b>						
Mean	14,728	6,923	10,083	8,722	2,627	5,301
Median	3,904	2,415	3,000	2,249	1,306	1,625

Note: Sample sizes indicate unweighted totals of nonagricultural businesses operated at the household level. Since some households have more than one business activity, the sample size indicates the total number of household businesses, not the number of individuals. Percentages and means are all weighted.

### 3.3.6 There is greater gender equality in formal enterprise

A very different picture emerges from detailed analysis of formal small and medium enterprise based on data from five surveys of SME carried out between 1997 and 2009 (Bjerge and Rand, 2011). These surveys sought to include all types of licensed non-state enterprises, including household businesses, private enterprises, co-operatives and limited liability companies. Household enterprises underrepresented in these surveys: 72% as opposed to 90% documented by GSO (2004).



The SME surveys suggest that the number of women owned/ managed enterprises have increased over the period covered by the surveys so that one in every three enterprise in 2009 was woman owned compared to 20% in the 1990s. It is likely that the expansion in women's enterprises reflects the passage of the Enterprise Law (EL) in 2000 which considerably simplified registration procedures. Prior to EL, private enterprises were only allowed to operate if they complied with series of government approvals and controls. The EL simplified registration procedures so new enterprises could be registered in 7 days on average, down from 90. Subsequently, the number of new registrations doubled to 14,000 and then rose further to 21,000 in 2001. The gender composition of this expansion suggests that women benefit disproportionately from the simplification of registration procedures.

The surveys report that the majority of informal enterprises are household-based with an over-representation of women. However, econometric analysis using post 2002 data found that among licensed businesses, male entrepreneurs were more likely to operate household enterprises while women operated limited liability companies.

There are many other gender differences, although they have diminished recently. Within the production sector women are concentrated in food/beverages and textiles while men are in produce furniture, fabricated metals and wood products. Women tend to have more assets on average than men with men having a larger share of financial assets and women having a larger share of physical assets. Men are more likely to finance their investments from retained earnings while both sexes are equally likely to resort to formal bank loans. Financing by retained earnings has lessened possibly because of increased credit flows following WTO accession and partly as a result of the inclusion of subsidized credit to SMEs as a result of post crisis stimulus package.

Male owned enterprises show somewhat higher innovative capacity, but capital utilization rates are higher for females. Only 9% of enterprises are engaged in export – only 4% of sample with few gender differences. So exports are largely dominated by large enterprises. Male owned firms are less likely to experience high net profit and short term growth rates, less likely to hire employees and have higher wages shares though the total cost of wages is higher in female owned businesses.

Econometric estimates of firm survival and growth suggest that size and innovative capacity matter for survival but gender has no significant effect on survival or short term growth. This supports the conclusion by Hanset et al who found no evidence of gender discrimination between women and men in Viet Nam's business sector and only limited gender differences compared to other countries (World Bank, 2006). Owners with higher levels of formal education had lower likelihoods of survival, while legally owned businesses and household enterprises are more likely to survive

Nevertheless, there are key differences in enterprises related to gender. For example, female enterprises earn significantly higher net profits than male enterprises – about 8.9% higher - controlling for firm size, age of firm, total assets, owner's education, innovative capacity and level of technology (Bjerge and Rand, 2011). Male enterprises have a small (2%) but statistically significant higher wage share,



reflecting positive relationship to number of employees and larger number of temporary workers. Indeed, workers in male enterprises get a higher share of total value added. The share of wage costs is lower in female enterprises – primarily because they are more likely to employ female workers who tend to be lower paid.

Enterprises which use premises for residential purposes have lower net profits, suggesting household enterprises are less profitable. Female entrepreneurs are more likely to get credit through Social Policy Banks and to use housing as collateral while male seek formal credit from SOCBs and are more likely to use land as collateral, maybe because they are more likely to have their names on the LTC. Female owners worked more hours per day while males worked more days a week, yielding little difference in total weekly hours - but of course these estimates of working hours do not include hours spent in unpaid household work.

One important set of findings from this survey relates to the factors associated with the registration of informal household enterprises. Namely, the probability of registering increases with annual value-added generated by enterprise units and with their size but it decreases with the number of employees, possibly reflecting an attempt to avoid social security costs. Enterprises with professional premises are more likely to register than those with no fixed premise. Businesses run from home fall between the two.

As far as individual characteristics were concerned, the better educated heads were more likely to register, as were men compared to women, and non-migrants compared to migrants. Businesses set up to allow greater independence or to follow family tradition were more likely to register than those set up as a default option or as a sideline activity. Among the reasons given by heads of registered businesses for registering, access to markets, the possibility of developing relations with large firms and the possibility of greater public profile appeared to be important. A number of heads also mentioned less exposure to corruption if they registered – although in reality, registered firms appeared to experience more corruption.

### *3.3.7 The experiences of vulnerable groups*

In addition, to gender differences in the impact of the capacities for taking advantage of globalization, gender intersects with other structures in the economy to create particular forms of vulnerability, some long established, others newly emerging. We will focus our discussion on vulnerability associated with migration, ethnicity, and climate change to illustrate this point. These workers enter the labor market through different entry points, and are found in different sectors and occupations, so their problems vary considerably. Each group represents a particular set of policy challenges that must be confronted if Viet Nam is to consolidate its status as middle income country.

### 3.3.8 Migrant workers

Government policy in Viet Nam strongly encourages the export of Vietnamese labor but continues to exercise controls over its internal movement despite the fact that both forms of migration have made major contributions to economic development and poverty reduction. As the Joint Country Assessment pointed out: “Remittances are significant direct contributions to poverty reduction in rural areas. The amount of remittances received from international and internal migration in 2007 was estimated USD 5.5 billion<sup>7</sup>, with an increasing proportion resulting from internal migrants<sup>8</sup>. 87% of Vietnamese households were estimated to receive some form of remittances<sup>9</sup> indicating the large reach of migration impacts on poverty’.

Generally remittances are thought to help to redistribute part of the earnings gained abroad or in the urban and industrial areas to poorer, often rural, areas and thereby reduce the uneven pace of development across regions. However, in Viet Nam international remittances actually tend not to go to poorer families, in part because of the large population permanently living overseas who typically migrated from less poor areas (Cuong and Mont 2010)

In addition, according to Hoang (2009) and Dang (2003), migration provides employment opportunities for female workers in particular and helps to diversify female employment out of agriculture. Migration thus offers an important means through which Viet Nam can sustain its growth trajectory but, as the following discussion suggests its full developmental potential will be more effectively realized if the barriers and problems encountered by internal and international migrants are addressed.

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<sup>7</sup> United Nations Development Program (2009).

<sup>8</sup> International share of total remittances fell from 71.7% in 1992/1993 -57.3% in 1997/1998; share of remittances within same province increased from 18.9%- 25.8% and between provinces increased from 9.4%- 17% during same period. (Pfau and Long, ‘Gender and Remittance Flows in Viet Nam during Economic Transformation’, Asia Pacific Journal August 2008)

<sup>9</sup> VHLSS 2004.

## Internal migration

Internal migration as a livelihood strategy can be more easily used by poorer families than international migration as it poses fewer legal, administrative and cultural restrictions and less upfront costs than international migration. It also operates through informal networks with few or no recruitment agents involved. It is more flexible than international migration as distances are shorter and cheaper, allowing remittances to be sent home more easily. It is notable that in past surveys<sup>10</sup> large majorities of migrants report improvements in their living conditions as a result of their migration. But even internal migration is not an option for the very poorest, since it still involves financial and social resources<sup>11</sup>.

The experience of internal migrants is closely bound up with the household registration system. Known as the 'ho khau' system, this seeks to control the internal movements of the Vietnamese population through their registration category.

*KT1 are permanent residents and entitle rural holders to agricultural land and household plots and urban residents to their houses and gardens. KT2 are those who work within the province in which they were registered but in a different district. KT3 are those who are registered in one province but have permission to reside permanently in another. KT4 are those students and seasonal workers residing temporarily in a province other than the one in which they were registered. In addition, there are an unknown number of unregistered migrants, people who are registered in one place but living permanently or temporarily in another district or province without official permission. Anyone who lives in a location other than their permanent residence for more than 30 days is supposed to apply for KT4 status. This requires permission from local authorities in their place of official residence on the basis of evidence of a job or school registration at their destination. Hence there are large numbers of migrants who do not have KT4 status.*

There has been some relaxation of requirements. In 2005 the conditions necessary to issue a household registration book were made easier to allow a smoother transition from KT4 to permanent status while the new Law of Residence of 2007 states that each citizen has the right to decide where to reside and removes evidence of employment as a condition for registration. Nevertheless, KT3 and KT4 registrants who make up the majority of the population in major cities along with unregistered migrants continue to face difficulties. The residency law is still an onerous process (UN 2009) and unevenly enforced. For instance, those living in rented accommodations must get their landlords'

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, GSO & UNFPA (2006).

<sup>11</sup> Trinh Duy Luan, Vu Manh Loi, Nguyen Thanh Liem, Mary McDonnell, 'Youth Migration in Viet Nam: Trends and Problems' in Viet Nam's Socio-Economic Development A quarterly Review No 55, 2008 ; UNICEF study on Impact of Migration on Left Behind Families, to be published; ActionAid Viet Nam and Oxfam, Participatory Monitoring of Urban Poverty in Viet Nam, 2009

permission to register themselves under his or her registry book otherwise they are not eligible to register. Since access to social services and other administrative procedures is still tied to registration status, unregistered migrants are at a major disadvantage in their place of destination.

The results of the 2004 Migration Survey were discussed in VGA 2006. Key findings were the increased representation of women in migration flows, the importance of economic reasons in motivating migration and the improvements in income streams as a result of migration. Young women tended to migrate from rural to urban areas to work in manufacturing or as domestics in the informal sector. Men were more likely to migrate within rural areas as seasonal agricultural labor or labor on industrial farms or to cities to work in construction or factories. Women migrants were more likely than men to be employed for foreign companies in the south east industrial zone. In the Central highlands where whole families migrated, the majority of both men and women worked in small companies or were self employed.

According to the Urban Poverty Study (GSO 2009) migration is significant. Over 17% of people living in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City are migrants. They are younger than non-migrants and have less education and training, but of course are much more likely to be in the work force (85% compared to 59% for non-migrants). They are equally likely to be women.

The 2009 LFS estimated 6.6 million internal migrants, excluding short term and return migrants (Pierre, 2011). There were more women than men in all groups of migrants: within districts, between districts and across provinces. Migrants have been getting younger over time, with women generally younger than men since 1989. In 2009, migrants were largely concentrated in the 20-29 age group. Female migrants tend to dominate in shorter distance flows between districts while men dominate in many inter-provincial flows. Most migrants were engaged in low-skilled work when they first arrive, and then move up the occupational ladder to more skilled work, depending on their qualifications<sup>12</sup>. First-time employment after the move is often located in small-scale enterprises or self-employment. About one-quarter of first-time migrant women work in foreign-invested organization after migration, indicating the importance of this sector in drawing in female migrants from rural areas. Indeed, women have come to dominate in the flow of migration to urban areas and industrial zones.

An IOM study found that 61% of women were self employed compared to 33% of men, 25% of men and 15% of women were hired in household enterprises while 32% of men and 8% of women were hired in factories or industry zones. Fourteen percent of migrants, mainly women, had office jobs. Many of these have benefited from recent resident registration policy change, the Law on Registration, which allows many KT3 residents to access permanent registration status. Women worked longer hours: many more women than men were in self-employment, because of the flexibility of working hours. However, 65% of women worked more than 8 hours a day compared to only 52% of men.

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<sup>12</sup> UNFPA, Internal Migration in Viet Nam: The Current Situation, 2007

Although working hours and days are very similar for men and women, female migrants earned about 22 Million VND a year (1128 USD), while male migrants made 32 Million VND (1644USD). These differences remain even after factors such as age, education and occupation are taken into account. Female migrants were likely to be in the lowest paid group in urban areas. However, incomes of both migrant women and men are above the national average of 1032 USD, which is why labor migration will remain an important livelihood option for rural families.

Internal migrants are likely to be found in various forms of wage and self employment but undocumented migrants and those in the KT4 tend to be over-represented at the poorer and more casual end of the informal employment spectrum. Certainly migrants appear to make up much of the mobile labor market in Hanoi, according to the study referred to earlier. They are generally not in competition for these jobs with permanent residents but they are directly in competition with each other. They are not well linked to formal support structures and have difficulties accessing mass organizations<sup>13</sup> and other social networks. Often their long working hours do not allow them to engage in social activities and their knowledge on the existence of labor unions for example is often low<sup>14</sup>.

In addition, social stigma is attached to migrants and they are often viewed by local residents with mistrust and unease. They are stigmatized to be the root of much of the so-called 'social evils' that affect society such as crime, gambling and sex work. This adds to the marginalization and social segregation already created by the formal structures of registration and access to services and contributes to increased risk of violence and abuse.

Social segregation in turn leads to residential segregation with migrants living in areas with inadequate housing, and limited access to improved water supply and sanitation. Women are more likely than men particularly likely to live in rented accommodation (89% compared to 58%) and to cite their living place as a source of problem<sup>15</sup>. Men were more likely to lodge with relatives or friends. Much of this rented accommodation consisted of boarding houses are built as temporary housing solution and in areas, with no infrastructure, lack of electricity and no sewage system and poor or no connection by public transport<sup>16</sup>. Women spoke of living in uncomfortable quarters, sharing hostel accommodation with up to 30 people and one shared bathroom. Women also face high levels of theft and an insecure physical environment (Nguyen et al. 2009). They are at risk of sexual harassment at, and on the way, to work;

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<sup>13</sup> Waibel Michael, 'Migration to Greater Ho Chi Minh City in the course of Doi Moi Policy' 2007, Dang Nguyen Anh 'Internal Migration; Opportunities and Challenges for the Renovation and Development in Viet Nam,2005,

<sup>14</sup> ActionAid Viet Nam and Oxfam, Participatory Monitoring of Urban Poverty in Viet Nam, 2009;

<sup>15</sup> Le Bach and Khuat Thu., Market Transformation, Migration and Social Protection', Institute for Social Development Studies 2008; 107

<sup>16</sup> Waibel Michael, 'Migration to Greater Ho Chi Minh City in the course of Doi Moi Policy' 2007



Duong et al (ref) found that women spoke of being cheated at business and being bullied in a way that men did not experience. A number of women had gone into sex work because they could not find another job in the city or because they had been forced into sex in exchange for assistance provided.

While some migrants reported improvements in health as a result of income improvements, temporary migrants living in poor conditions with no social insurance found official health programs difficult to access. The higher vulnerability of migrant women to sexual abuse and violence places them at risk of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/Aids, as well as a range of post traumatic stress disorders associated with sexual abuse<sup>17</sup>. Abortion rates are reported to be very high in the industrial zones with high concentration of workers<sup>18</sup>.

At the same time, a research into the economic contributions of migrants highlights its importance for their households. Around half of the men and women interviewed in the IOM study (ref) were considered to be the family breadwinner. The study also confirmed what earlier studies had found: women were likely to remit money to their families more regularly and frequently than men although men remitted larger amounts. Women also reported being under greater pressure to send regular remittances to their families than men: 44% compared to 32%. 56% of women intended to send all the money they saved home compared to 42% of men.

The study also highlighted the difficulties faced by migrants in managing their income and remittances. Around 75% stored their money with themselves, although most did not consider this to be a safe option. Banks and post offices considered safest but only 20% chose this. Trang and Lan (2007) note that domestic migrants still use private remittance services despite insecurities. However, both men and women migrants tend to bring money home in person although this means of transfer is regarded as less safe than sending the money through formal channels such as bank transfer and postal services.

Advocacy for addressing some of the problems encountered by internal migrants, men as well as women, include more uniform implementation of the Law of Residence, de-coupling registration status from access to basic services, greater emphasis on pro-poor urban housing, infrastructure and services and the development of accessible and reliable means for sending remittances.

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<sup>17</sup> Committee for Social Affairs, National Assembly, 2002 Cited in Dang Nguyen Anh, 'Internal Migration; Opportunities and Challenges for the Renovation and Development in Viet Nam,2005

<sup>18</sup> Thi and Kim 2003, cited in Dang Nguyen Anh, 'Internal Migration; Opportunities and Challenges for the Renovation and Development in Viet Nam, 2005

## External migration

As noted earlier, the government of Viet Nam has a policy of encouraging labor export. Labor export is seen as an important mechanism for generating foreign currency, and increasing workers skills and living standards. As such, Viet Nam has adopted a policy of promoting overseas employment as part of its national development strategy to both promote overseas migration and to protect migrants. In fact, Viet Nam has made it part of its anti-poverty policy by subsidizing overseas migration heavily in the nation's 62 poorest districts (Le and Mont 2010).

While there were early waves of migration to the Eastern bloc countries, it was not until the post-Doi Moi era, that labor export took on greater significance as part of official policies to address un/under-employment and increase labor contributions to GNP and foreign exchange growth. Compared to other labor-sending countries in the region, the number of contract labor migrants in Viet Nam is still small: in 2005, for instance, Philippines sent close to a million workers, Indonesia sent 400,000, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka around 200,000 while Viet Nam sent 70-80,000. In 2008, less than 100,000 migrants had gone abroad and just 45,000 in the first 8 months of 2009. Around 30% of migrants in 2008-09 were women (Belanger et al. 2010). In their study of 1265 migrants, Belanger et al. (2010) found that most were between the ages of 20 and 39, that higher percentages of women were found in flows to Taiwan (61%) and Japan (42%) while men predominated in flows to Malaysia (65%) and South Korea (90%). Female migrants went into factories and domestic work while male migrants went into factories, agriculture and fisheries and construction work.

While most migrant workers report improvements in their situation as a result of migration, Belanger et al (2010) reported that some saw little improvement and even deterioration in their situation. This variation in outcomes reflects variations in migration costs, the conditions under which migrants work, including pay, health and safety, and the extent to which migrants are victims of deception. Men working in fisheries and agriculture reported the worst working conditions and higher rates of desertion from their jobs as well as return to Viet Nam. Women paid lower pre-departure costs, sent back more remittances and returned home with more money. They were less likely to run away and work illegally. Nearly three quarters of households received remittances through bank transfers, the most secure route, while others sent it through informal means.

Along with the problems encountered by external migrants in destination countries are problems associated with the recruitment process. Lack of information on the part of workers means that individuals operating as labor export agents or brokers have been able to obtain payments by fraudulent means (Le and Mont 2010). In addition many operate illegally encouraging a flow of undocumented migration out of the country. How much of this flow is trafficked labor is not known since it is not easy to distinguish between voluntary and forced migration. There are concerns that the migration of 'brides' from Viet Nam has the potential to lead to exploitation and abuse and could constitute trafficking. Arranged marriages are brokered by agents acting on behalf of men from Singapore, Taiwan, China and South Korea. Many use deception. Domestic trafficking networks bring

women and girls from rural and remote areas to urban industrialized areas for begging or sexual exploitation. There are estimated to be around 200,000 sex workers in Viet Nam in 2003, 13% of them less than age 18. Children were procured – often by deception -- mainly from large families with poorly educated parents whose per capita income ranged from half the national average in the North to less than a third in the South. There were also an estimated 20-30,000 Vietnamese women and girls in sex work in Cambodia.

The government has sought to regulate the flow of external migration, including legislation in 2006 defining the obligations of recruiting and placement agencies and signing an anti-trafficking law in 2005. The implementation of these laws remains a concern. Viet Nam has not yet signed the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, conveying the impression that Viet Nam is a passive partner in migration, ‘not wishing to endanger established markets for its surplus labor’. (Anh p.15 ref). While the process of ratification would take time and require amendment of existing laws, it has the advantage of providing a basis for addressing the violations of workers’ rights abroad.

In future, the government is likely to seek to upgrade the skills of migrant workers to respond to new niches emerging in the region and to competition with migrant streams from other countries. This will require greater attention to the provision and quality of training provided through policies that dovetail with a wider approach to building the quality of the labor force.

### *3.3.9 Vulnerable groups: ethnic minorities*

The previous chapter noted various ways in which ethnic minorities, and women among them, had not shared in the reduction of poverty and improvement of human development to the same extent as members of the ethnic majority, known as the Kinh. Ethnic minorities also face greater constraints than the majority group in their livelihood options (World Bank, 2009). Ethnic minorities are more likely to live in remote and difficult terrain than their Kinh counterparts and less likely to travel to their local district town, let alone to the provincial capital or other regions and the larger cities. They have been less able to take advantage of new labor export policies by the government to work overseas because of language and other barriers. This may be changing somewhat with the recent introduction of international migration subsidies in the 62 Poorest Districts Program (Le and Mont, 2010). Ethnic minority regions have the lowest rates of remittances, the lowest ratios of remittances to overall incomes and the lowest size of remittances, according to VHLSS data.

Ethnic minority people are less likely to engage in wage employment, but the correlation between ethnicity and wage employment is weaker for women than for men. This is because men in the Kinh ethnic group are more likely to hold jobs in wage-employment as compared to agricultural self-employment, but women from both majority and minority ethnic groups are more likely to be self-employed in agricultural activities. However, within the ethnic minorities, all groups have a higher incidence of agricultural self-employment as compared to wage-employment, with the ethnic

groups who experience the highest poverty rates (Northern Mountain and Central Ethnic groups) also reporting the lowest rates of wage-employment. The female disadvantage in access to wage-employment holds across ethnic groups. Both ethnic men and women are thus disproportionately concentrated in informal self employment in the agricultural sector.

Women from ethnic minorities tend to be disadvantaged relative to women from majorities communities in other ways as well. They are far less involved in market activity than their Kinh counterparts and have less access to productive resources and extension services. It is also evident that they are less well served by the Women's Union and hence have less access to the credit and other facilities provided by the Union.

Tourism has been actively promoted by the Vietnamese government through investment in local cultural aspects which are likely to have special appeal, with particular significance in ethnic minority areas where it has brought a new dynamism into the local economy. A UNESCO study among the Hmong, Dao and Giay communities in the district of Sa Pa has highlighted its varying impact on different ethnic communities. One factor is geography: communities at some distance from major tourist attractions tend to lose out or certain villages may be selected by the government for special promotion as a cultural site.

In addition, there is uneven participation by the different communities in the main activities associated with tourism. While Hmong and Dao women were able to adapt their existing textile making skills to commercial markets, Giay women can only take part in semi-finished products or sell those made in factories. But along with the Kinh majority, the Giay were better positioned in terms of financial capital and social connections to benefit from tourist related services. The study notes how the existence of an NGO-supported textile producing club helped to training its members in new designs and patterns based on their textile traditions which they continued to use in their independent trading activities after they left the club. While tourism thus drew many more women into market-related activities, it was largely through the commercialization of activities associated with their traditional roles within the household. Nevertheless, despite their heavier workloads, the study notes evidence of a new economic independence among women from the ethnic minority communities.

Major infrastructure projects offer another route to expanding employment opportunities in ethnic minority areas. They can be designed not only to achieve their primary goal of improving connections with the rest of the economy but also creating employment opportunities for those who are normally excluded. The World Bank's Third Rural Transport Project offers an example of this. It prioritized rural road maintenance and local infrastructure management over the construction of new highways, and found that the problems associated with the achievement of this goal were greatest in mountainous areas and would impose a heavy financial burden on local communities, many among the poorest in Viet Nam.

One solution appeared to lie in recruiting women from communities along rural roads who expressed an interest in taking responsibility for this task. An initiative was piloted across four communes in Lao Cai province which aimed at mobilizing support for rural road maintenance within ethnic communities and improving local livelihoods by providing off season jobs for ethnic minority women in the area, while at the same time reducing maintenance costs and improving the timeliness of repairs. The Provincial Women's Union acted as implementing agency. Women were trained in engineering and building practices and a total of 1533 recruited as road maintenance workers. Around 10-30 women were responsible for maintaining 1-2 kilometer sections of road for three months at a salary of 100,000 VND a day per person. For many women, this was the first employment opportunity of their lives. Because demand for the work outstripped supply, steering committees set up by the women themselves rotated the available opportunities to all women within the selected communities. The program is currently in the process of being expanded.

From a development perspective, it is clear that along with broad-based efforts to ensure the inclusion of ethnic minority groups in Viet Nam's growth process, additional efforts will be needed to address gender inequalities within these groups which are often greater than those prevailing among the ethnic majority. Such efforts will need to go beyond purely economic policies to address the skills deficits and lack of self confidence evident among many ethnic minority women – an issue taken up again in the next chapter.

### *3.3.10 Vulnerable groups: farmers affected by climate change*

We can regard climate change as one of the emerging challenges which Viet Nam now faces and one that is likely to take on increasing significance. It is among the countries most affected by the adverse effects of climate change, especially in coastal and low-lying regions. Around one million Vietnamese on average are affected annually by disasters, including flooding, in the Mekong Delta region. Serious droughts affect the central coast region, the Mekong Delta and mountainous areas. There is as yet very little research into the how men and women are coping with climate change but some points from the available literature are worth noting.

Vulnerability to climate change is shaped not only by exposure, but most of all by sensitivity and adaptive capacity. According to a United National and Oxfam study in 2009, women and female headed households rely more on natural resources because of their traditional roles in securing household subsistence, compared to men and male headed households and are more likely to remain in a rural location. In terms of adaptive capacity, men generally have greater mobility than women in these rural communities, greater opportunities to obtain employment off-farm and are more likely to be able to undertake seasonal outmigration to cities. Men also have greater access to and control over livelihood resources due to prevailing gender inequalities.

A great deal of temporary outmigration is in fact in response to irregular climate stresses triggered by climate change – and is likely to increase. Labor outmigration, mainly short term, is higher in



areas reliant on rain fed ecosystems compared to irrigated rice farming ecosystems, due to low rice productivity and lack of alternative forms of income. Environmental degradation is also a contributing stressor in migration patterns in the Mekong Delta; during flood seasons people undertake seasonal migration and migration in to towns in search of work. An extreme coping mechanism is human trafficking into neighboring areas. While migration reduced vulnerability, it increases the workloads of women who must cope on their own.

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Although disasters present the most visible impacts of climate change, slow onset climate change effects such as recurrent droughts in different areas represent significant risks for rural populations in Viet Nam. An on-going trend is of the feminization of agriculture, with women taking on more of men's traditional agricultural tasks (e.g. spraying pesticides, plowing) and disaster preparation and recovery during periods of outmigration by male household members or where men take up local non-farming jobs. Women in female headed households may gain new status and skills when gender roles are shaken up, however, outmigration clearly places a strain on those left behind who have to complete the same agricultural tasks sometimes with lesser access to labor and associated skills.

Climate change is already having serious impacts on agriculture with extreme climatic disasters and lesser but repeated climatic stresses – so women's productive roles and contributions to households are being affected. If women's ability to secure household subsistence is undermined, their status within the household is may also undermined. In Avao men and women are traditionally jointly clearing land for cultivation by women, e.g. men set fire, and women clear the remnants and collect firewood. Men increasingly engage in non-farming income generation and also collect forest products. If they no longer clear fields women might ask for help from male relatives or do it entirely alone, in order to fulfill their traditional subsistence responsibilities.

Gendered impacts in relation to financial and economic capital assets of climate change also exist. Damage to crops affects household income and both women and men reportedly have higher workloads as they have to seek waged labor to make ends meet. The increased unpredictability of rains means villagers are forced to replant crops, creating more work especially for women. Given that there is a trend of feminization of agriculture as (mainly male) seasonal outmigration increases, it is clear that

women will be most affected by negative slow-onset effects of climate change on farming, as well as the impacts of extreme events. Field research found that women are forced to replant rice crops and plant more subsidiary crops to supplement lost yields. The structural impact of these climatic stresses on gender relations requires more exploration: e.g. How will women's ability to secure household food security be affected and with what impact on their status within the household?

Temporary outmigration and local non-farm labor as strategies to deal with increasing climate-related disasters are likely to increase, and in many cases this is will be among primarily male household members – whilst young women also migrate from certain areas with employment in for example garment industry. International experience indicates that migration has gendered social impacts in both the population staying behind and amongst migrants. This may be positive when women are able to challenge traditional roles and increase their status in the community, but is often negative when women's workloads increase and yet their access to key livelihood assets remains limited. Quite often male household members are away working when disasters strike and women are forced to conduct most of the DRM activities.

### GENDER AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

#### 4.1 Introduction

As noted in Chapter 1, Viet Nam has passed a number of important laws and policies in relation to gender equality goals but the implementation of these laws is far from satisfactory. The problem is partly a practical lack of knowledge of these laws, particularly at the levels at which they need to be implemented and partly lack of capacity on the part of those responsible for implementing them. A broader problem is the limited presence of women in public decision-making forums and in politics more generally and the failure to mobilize the broad based support necessary for effective implementation. Greater gender equality in politics and public decision-making is both a manifestation of the extent of the progress women have made in a society relative to men as well as one of the most effective ways to guarantee continued progress.

This is recognized by the Vietnamese government. The National Strategy and Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women and the Viet Nam MDGs have set specific targets for women's participation in leadership and management. The Law on Gender Equality 2006 specifies concrete measures to advance gender equality in politics (Article 11). A number of gender specific goals have been adopted as Central Party policy: women in leadership in party committees at all levels to reach 25% or more by 2020; female members of Parliament and People's Councils at all levels to reach between 35 and 40%. Government bodies and organizations are to maintain at least 30% of female leadership. The VGS 2006 pointed out that progress on gender equality in decision-making and politics has not been as impressive as it has been in some other areas. This chapter returns to this issue. It reports on how women have fared in policy and political decision-making and identifies some of the barriers to greater progress.

#### 4.2 Women's roles in the Communist Party

The Communist Party is the only political party in Viet Nam. Leading positions in government and elected bodies are largely drawn from its membership. Hence how women fare within the party has important implications for how women fare in leadership positions more generally (VASS, 2009). Women made up 25% of party membership in 2007, an increase from 21% in 2006. However, there was only one woman in the Politburo during the 11th legislation of the party (2011-2015), two women in the ten member secretariat and 14 in the 175 central committee of the Party.

**Table 4.1 -- Percentage Representation of Women in Communist Party Executive Committees**

Executive Committee	2001 – 2006	2006- 2010	2010- 2015
Central level	8.6	8.13	
Provincial level	11.32	11.75	
District level	12.89	14.70	15.01
Commune level	11.88	15.08	18.01

*Source: Viet Nam Women's Union, 2011*

The 2010 status report on women's political representation in 21 countries in the Asia-Pacific region noted that Viet Nam was one of only 7 countries where women's representation at the national level exceeded 20%. However, there has been a decline from 27.3% of deputies in the National Assembly in 2002-2007 to 25.76% of deputies 2007-2011 term and 24.4% of deputies for the 2011-2016 term. The percentage of women holding ministerial and equivalent posts also declined over this period from 12% to 4.5%. There were only 3 women out of 34 ministers during the 2002-2007 legislature and only 2 woman out of 22 in the current legislature.

Men dominate in the various bodies making up the National Assembly as men make up the overwhelming majority in the committees of law, justice, economics, foreign affairs and finance (between 85 – 92%). Only in the 'softer' departments of culture, education, youth and children, social affairs and science, technology and environment are there are higher percentages of women: between 28 and 37%. Women are best represented on the Ethnic Council which has 20 women out of 40 members.

**Table 4.2 -- Percentage of women in the National Assembly during 2002 – 2007, 2007 - 2011 and 2011-2016.**

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

*Source: Office of the National Assembly 2011*

**Table 4.3 -- Percentage of women in provincial, district and commune people's councils during 1999 – 2004, 2004 - 2011 and 2011-2016.**

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

*Source: Office of the National Assembly 2011*

**Table 4.4 -- Percentage of women as chairs and vice-chairs in provincial, district and commune people's councils during 1999 – 2004 and 2004 - 2011.**

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

*Source: Viet Nam Women's Union, 2011*

**Table 4.5 -- Percentage of women as chairs and vice-chairs in provincial, district and commune people's committees during 1999 – 2004, 2004 - 2011.**

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

*Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, 2011*

The trends over this period are somewhat more positive in lower level elected bodies. Women's participation rates have gradually increased: from 21.1% to 23.9% in city and provincial people's councils, 21 to 23% in district people's councils and 16.5 to 19.5% in commune people's councils. However, the percentage of women in leadership positions at lower levels remains very low. Progress has been steady but slow. The people's committees are appointed by people's councils as the executive and administrative agency at provincial, district and commune levels. Moreover, women's



education levels are generally higher than those men party leaders at commune level, suggesting women need higher levels of education to gain the support of local party members.

The VASS study concluded that ‘there are very few female leaders across all sectors considered... Their ratio is much lower than female labor in the total workforce of each respective sector... There is no persuasive evidence of progress over time with regards to women leadership....’ p. 22. A study by the Institute of Family and Gender Studies (2009) emphasizes the importance of building women’s leadership from the bottom up and from the point of recruitment:

*‘In principle, creating human resources stems from the grassroots level and starts at receiving new staff. Creating human resources effectively is described in the pyramid pattern. For instance, at provincial level, in order to have 15% of female leaders in departments, the locality must have 20-25% of female heads of divisions, 20-40% of female civil servants and 50% of newly recruited staff. “If any locality just has 15% of female civil servants and plan to have 15% of female into leadership positions, it fails to meet the quota” (Male, leader of a Party department).*

### 4.3 Obstacles to participation

There are a variety of obstacles that women face in public life that men do not have to deal with. Some of these were touched on in the previous VGA and, due to institutionalized nature of the gender inequalities involved, continue to be relevant. The new qualitative analysis by the Institute for Family and Gender Studies (IFGS) carried out in 2009 elaborates on some of this earlier analysis as well as offering additional new insights. We draw heavily on this report in the analysis that follows.

#### 4.3.1 *The unequal burden of unpaid work*

One of the most deeply institutionalized of these is the unequal gender division of labor within the home. As noted in Chapter 3, while working men and women put in very similar hours in paid work, women put in far longer hours in unpaid work. These unpaid, and largely taken-for-granted, familial responsibilities do not only curtail her choices in the market place, they also constitute a major barrier to her participation in public life more generally. Any woman who wants to participate in politics or in public life must find ways to reconcile her familial responsibilities with her professional or political obligations. As one female leader in a provincial party unit pointed out, women often think that “leadership are something far away, have it or not have it... as no one can be sure whether she is planned for the promotion or not. If [unfortunately] she is out of the list and step back and the family breaks, then nothing left for her”. Men do not feel discouraged in the same way in pursuing leadership positions because they do not face the same conflict between family and work.

The extent to which women are able to pursue leadership positions therefore will depend crucially on having a supportive family. The attitudes of husbands, in particular, can make a significant difference to how women fare in public life. There are issues of ‘face’ involved. As interviews with public officials revealed, men are particularly unhappy if their wives hold higher positions than them or outdoes them

in any way. Such attitudes clearly act as a brake on women's capacity or even desire to advance at work. Conversely, women who have supportive husbands and family networks are in a much better position to take advantage of opportunities for advancement.

*"My husband is sharing and my family is supportive and that helps my current success possible. I have two sons and our parents and relatives help a lot. Whenever I go for business, my aunts come to give helping hand. Not all women enjoy such advantageous conditions like me. I got support from all my closed relatives. In 1992, I went abroad for study for a year, they helped caring my children. Sometimes, I go for business for two or three months. My dad comes and helps our children study math" (Female, deputy minister).*

*"When women are in high positions, they need more time for works and therefore they spend less time for family. It is all right if their family understands, and if they don't, it will become pressure for women. The husband's attitude is very important. Women have to ask their husband to understand and support them. He will help persuade other members of family. If the husband understands, woman will be able to develop her career. If the husband is conservative, then the family will be at risk of break" (Male, leader of Chamber of Commerce and Industry).*

#### 4.3.2 Values and attitudes that hold women back

A second major obstacle relates to the values and attitudes that women encounter in public life from those in positions of seniority, from those they work alongside and from the public at large – as well as the values and attitudes they hold themselves. There is considerable resistance on the part of many men to the idea of women taking up leadership position (Vo Thi Mai, 2003). This is partly an 'issue of face' and partly the result of taken-for-granted beliefs that men have superior qualities. Male civil servants are three times more likely than women to express lack of faith in women's capacity for leadership.

*"Leaders often say no inequality but it is different in their minds and actions" (Female leader of City Women's Union).*

*"Gender equality does not exist in the thoughts of senior officials and even lower-level male staff. Men are still conservative and patriarchal. Male never highly evaluate their female counterparts by virtue of feudalistic ideologies and male-dominated ideas" (Male, leader of Chamber of Commerce and Industry).*

*"Female staff will have favorable conditions for development if there is an open-minded leader, but they will never get promoted if the leader is biased and with low gender awareness" (Male, leader of Industry and Commerce).*

The attitudes of those in senior positions can make an enormous difference to countering these prejudices, whether they are leaders of organizations, party units or administrative personnel. Attitudes also determine how effectively policy commitments to gender equality are carried out. In practice, the research suggests that leaders frequently hinder women's progress in a number of different ways. Preconceptions and stereotypes can undermine performance assessments of male and female staff. Very often these, rather than impersonal professional criteria, form the basis on which staff are judged. Female staffs are generally judged more harshly than male. .

"Women are always observed and overseen. If you are young, you will be said to be too young. If you are aged, you will be said to be too old or said you are too beautiful if you are fashionable" (Female leader of a Party department, city).

"Given the same action, people give more tolerant assessment on men while more harshly on women" (Female, leader of a department, city).

Other barriers placed in the way of women's rise to leadership positions include lip service to gender equality policy commitments rather than the institution of concrete measures for advancing gender equality in place, the ad hoc implementation of the government's female leadership quota policy, and the failure to carry out regular monitoring and assessment so that female leadership potential goes undiscovered. Many of those interviewed by the CGFS study stressed the lack of pro-active policies on the part of senior officials as a major obstacle to women's advancement.

*"An itinerary is necessary. If they do not have a large army of female employees to select from and to build their capacity, how they can meet the ratio of qualified female leaders in their agency" (Female, leader of a city department).*

*"Monitoring is overlooked. They just depend on reports. The personnel officials should listen and meet staff more often to discover talents, thus, [the percentage] will increase. The evaluation should be based on the actual activities of the staff" (Female, leader of a city people's council).*

*"Some leaders are simple. They just think the law on gender equality is there and no implementation guidance to be given or efforts to be made" (Female, leader of City People's Council).*

*"Practical measures are inadequate. Women must be well-trained before becoming a leader. They must be given chance to demonstrate their capacity. They must be empowered and gradually get promoted" (Male, leader of Viet Nam Chamber of Commerce and Industry).*

However, the problem of values and attitudes does not lie with men alone. Many women also subscribe to gender stereotypes. A study of the Viet Nam Women's Union found that a large number of respondents would choose men to the highest position and professional manager and women to the deputy position responsible for administrative works (Viet Nam Women's Union 2003). Another study reported that female leaders are labeled with the characteristics like obedience, emotion, dedication,

and restraint which are considered inappropriate for leadership (Nguyen Thi Thu Ha 2008). Such views have a deterring effect on women's willingness to persevere in their careers. Those that do are frequently viewed negatively as ambitious, power-hungry women rather than as women with courage and determination.

These norms and values are likely to hold women back from seeking leadership positions. For women from ethnic minority groups and from remote provinces, there may be additional constraints relating to the attitudes and practices of their own communities. As one male leader of a provincial parliamentary delegation noted "Especially, women of ethnic minority groups rarely take part in career activities. Khmer female in the South mostly do housework and care for agricultural works."

#### *4.3.3 Differential age of retirement*

"Men and women start at the same point. They spend the same period of education and working but men retire later than women five years. Women lose five years or equivalent to a term of service to participate in the leadership position. Hence, women not only compete with men in terms of capacity but they also have to mature before men for five years. Obviously, women lose opportunities" (Female, leader of city department).

The regulation regarded retirement age, on the other hand, is an example of explicit gender bias since it clearly differentiates the age at which men and women can retire. The requirement that women retire at 55 while men retire at 60 not only terminates women's careers at an earlier age than men, but it has knock-on effects on other aspects of their careers. In particular, it interacts with women's earlier age at marriage compared to men and their greater responsibilities for family and child care to not only compress the period of time that women have to gain the experiences and qualification necessary to advance to senior positions but also a period of time during which women must attend to competing demands on their time.

The knock-on effects of this on women's human resource development opportunities are described in detail below but there are other implications. Women will always be at a disadvantage to men when candidates at the same stage of their careers are being considered for senior posts: women with, say, five years left for retirement will always be younger and less experienced than equivalent men. Men have a longer working life in which to develop their own capacities and at the final stages of their careers, there are very few female competitors. The gender bias in retirement age regulations is exacerbated, in many cases by its interaction with other regulations. The fact that they are not awarded merits during maternity leave further shortens the period of time they have to gain the recognition they need to catch up with the appointment age frame. In addition, there is a Party regulation that requires that anyone who becomes a member of party committee for the first time must be at an age that allows them to hold the position for at least two terms in succession. This excludes a far larger percentage of women than men for seeking such membership since women must have been born five years longer than men to qualify.

It should be acknowledged that not all women are in favor of raising the retirement age for women. Blue collar women and women with physically difficult job enjoy earlier retirement, so one policy option that has been put forward is to make retirement optional for women at age 55, but mandatory at age 60. This option, while easing the problems mentioned above, still creates a situation of inequality between men and women, and is not in line with CEDAW's recommendation for equal retirement.

### *Unequal opportunities for human resource development*

Studies show that women are less likely to participate in activities considered critical to their future promotion prospects. Work rotation, for instance, is considered essential for gaining hands-on experiences. The rate of rotation of female officials at provincial and central levels is 0.8 and 0.9 time in five years, respectively. The rate of male officials is 1.3 and 1.2 times, respectively. Women are also less likely than men to participate in refresher and training courses. For instance, women accounted for just 10-20 percent of all participants of political theory and administration courses so far at the central level (VWU 2009). Only 39% of female officials had attended 1-2 training courses compared to 42.3 percent of male. Only 2.9% of female officials had attended 3 training courses compared to 8.7% male. 58.6% female officials had never attended a training course compared to 49% of male (National Administrative Academy, AusAID, pp. 25, 29).

There are a variety of reasons why women lose out on opportunities for developing their professional capacity through short and long-term courses (summarized in Box). Gender differences in age of retirement contribute strongly to this outcome. Given women's shorter working life, investment in training male civil servants is generally considered a more efficient use of resources than training female. There are also explicit regulations that reinforce this bias. There are regulations, for instance, that stipulate that men should not exceed 40 years and women 35 years in order to qualify for training courses on administrative and political refresher courses or study abroad. And then there are apparently gender-neutral regulations which impact very differently on men and women. For instance, while women face a shorter working life than men, both men and women are only eligible to be sent to training and refresher courses only after 3-5 years of working.

### **Box 2. When is it appropriate to study?**

*"... Men retire at 60 years old and get married at about 30 years old. Women are supposed to get married in their twenties. At the workplace, it is regulated that staff is eligible to be sent to training after 3-5 years of working experience so it is too late for women. The study life [should] be finished before getting married and giving births. Married women can pursue further study but they are often busy with caring children. I see all women complaining that it is very difficult for a married woman to study because of hard life. They all say will study after 2-3 years until their children grow up but until then, they are busy with caring for their children's study. I think the best choice is to study before getting married. Some women assume study after getting married but it depends on their family conditions. If both spouses*



*are studying, their children are cared by nobody. Some people have parents help. If the family is better-off, both spouses can study. If both spouses are civil servants and their parent families are not in the city, it is very difficult for the spouses to pursue further study. Salary of a governmental employee is unable to buy stuff for children while study is costly. In the society, people believe that women with stable employment no need further study so women are not encouraged to develop. In addition, it depends on the husband. If the husband does care and has no prejudice, the wife has opportunity to study. Otherwise, women don't study further. If trying to negotiate, violence might occur" (Female, 26 years old, deputy division, city department of internal affairs).*

*Taken from IGFS, 2009:*

#### **4.4 National Machinery for Gender Equality in Viet Nam**

Viet Nam has extensive machinery for the promotion of gender equality, which can serve as a strong base for implementing policy, although as mentioned earlier it has been slower to action than planned. Nevertheless, the Government's commitment to gender equality is evident in its policies and at the institutional and structural level. Viet Nam is a signatory to human rights conventions which guarantee the equality between men and women (such as the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), International Convention on the Rights of the Child, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and ILO conventions on equal remuneration and discrimination (employment and occupation).

The basic structure of the national machinery for gender equality and the empowerment of women in Viet Nam encompasses various different entities including the Gender Equality Department (GED) in (MOLISA); the National Committee for the Advancement of Women (NCFAW), Committees for the Advancement of Women (CAWAs) in all government ministries; the Family Department within the Ministry of Culture Sport and Tourism (MOCST) and the Viet Nam Women's Union (VWU).

In November 2006 the National Assembly passed the Law on Gender Equality, establishing the Gender Equality Department within MOLISA in 2008 for coordinating the implementation of this Law. This department is also responsible for the implementation of the National Strategy on Gender Equality 2011-2015 which was approved in July 2011, and an associated national programme of action on gender equality 2011-2020 has been developed. The GED also works with the Department of Legislation in MOLISA to report and follow up on CEDAW and concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

In 2007 the National Assembly of Viet Nam passed the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control with the State Managing Agency for this law being MOCST. MOCST leads the collaboration on a national plan of action on domestic violence prevention and control for 2008-2015, and is working on a national plan of action that will run to 2020.

In addition to the two laws and the national strategy there is Resolution 11 of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party on the work for women in the period of industrialisation and modernisation of the country, dated 27 April 2007. Resolution 57 has issued a Government Programme of Action for the implementation of this resolution for the period till 2020. This resolution, as with the laws and national strategy has actions across ministries as well as the Viet Nam Women's Union.

#### 4.4.1 NCFAW/CFAWs

The National Committee for the Advancement to Women, whose secretariat is based in the GED of MOLISA, is an inter-sectoral body that advises the Prime Minister on gender equality and women's empowerment. In September 2008 the Minister of Labour Invalids and Social Affairs was designated as the president of NCFAW with the president of the Viet Nam Women's Union and the Vice Minister of MOLISA as vice-chairs.

Each ministry and province of Viet Nam also has a Committee for the Advancement of Women (CFAW). These committees are tasked with developing their own ministerial and provincial Plans of Action (POA) which are monitored by the NCFAW. At present there are currently four ministries which have Plans of Action for Gender Equality to span the period 2011-2015, these are: MOLISA and the Ministry of Health (MOH) whose plans have been approved, and MOCST and the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), whose plans are being finalized.

#### 4.4.2 Viet Nam Women's Union

The Viet Nam Women's Union (VWU) was founded on October 20 in 1930. It advises the Communist Party and the government on issues for women's advancement. More than 50% of the female population of Viet Nam are members of the VWU, with its current membership over 14 million. These members belong to over 10, 472 local women's unions in communes and towns throughout the country, with 642 district level units and 63 provincial units. The key goals stated by the VWU for 2007-2012 are: to raise capacity and knowledge and improve the material and spiritual life of women; to cultivate Vietnamese women who are patriotic, knowledgeable, healthy, skilful, dynamic, innovative, cultured and kind hearted; and to build and develop an organizationally strong VWU, which can play a key role in motivating women and protecting the legitimate rights and interests of women<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> Website [www.hoilhpn.org.vn](http://www.hoilhpn.org.vn), 25/7/11

#### 4.4.3 Non Government Actors

More recently, local non-government organizations and academic institutions have formed a partnerships for gender equality. There are now three such networks for gender equality work in Viet Nam. The first, established in 2005 is known as the Gender and Community Development Network (GENCOMNET). GENCOMNET is a voluntary network of Vietnamese non-governmental organizations, researchers, managers and practitioners, working for gender equity and gender equality that contributes to the formulation and implementation of gender related laws and policies<sup>20</sup>. In 2007 the Domestic Violence Prevention Network (DOVIPnet) DOVIPnet was established to increase the effectiveness and implementation of policies regarding the prevention of domestic violence by authorized agencies and to create a new orientation of social conceptions and opinions positively regarding domestic violence<sup>21</sup>. Most recently the Network for the Empowerment of Women (NEW) was founded in 2009. NEW is a network of organizations and individuals, who voluntarily participate in development activities to empower women, prevent gender-based violence and realize gender equality in Viet Nam. NEW has more than 50 members, who are representatives of North, Central and South of Viet Nam<sup>22</sup>. All three organizations work in research, training and advocacy feeding into policy discussions. In addition to these three networks there are many individuals and organizations that work on gender issues independently.

A Gender Donor Group was established in Viet Nam in 1999 with the aim of promoting gender equality in Viet Nam. In 2002 a review of its purpose and membership was undertaken by members and it was expanded to include gender experts from government institutions, donors, UN agencies and other organisations working on gender equality and was renamed the “Gender Action Partnership (GAP). The TOR for the group states in its purpose that it “aims to improve partnerships and coordination around gender equality and the advancement of women within and outside the government...the GAP will encourage government dialogue with donors, NGOs and civil society through the CG (Coordination Group), PRSC (Poverty Reduction Support Credits) process, and other relevant mechanisms, feeding into high level policy discussions”. The GAP is chaired by the NCFAW and includes representatives of Government Ministries, donors, research institutes and international and national organisations working for women’s advancement including representatives of GENCOMNET, NEW and DOVIPnet.

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<sup>20</sup> Website [www.gencomnet.org](http://www.gencomnet.org), 25/7/11

<sup>21</sup> DOVIPnet leaflet Progressing Regulations: Domestic Violence Prevention Network, May, 2011

<sup>22</sup> Website [www.new.org.vn](http://www.new.org.vn), 25/7/11

## 4.5 Building women's participation in grassroots democracy

Women's ability to participate in public decision-making processes goes beyond the formal political and policy domain. The Ordinance on Grassroots Democracy Decree, passed by the National Assembly in 2007, is intended to provide a framework to promote democratic participation at the local level, 'to allow citizens to know, to discuss, to act and to monitor socio-economic development'. There is also greater emphasis on decentralizing decision-making about development programs and projects to district and commune level to achieve a closer fit between needs and design. In fact, involving women in development projects and programs has provided a widely used route to increasing their participation in public life. Information on women's participation community affairs is extremely limited but what exists suggests very slow pace of progress.

Participatory poverty monitoring by Oxfam and ActionAid during the period 2008-09 points out that many of the barriers that women face higher up in the public sector are also encountered by women taking up leadership positions at the village level: 'Hindrances such as low education, family affairs and the community's prejudice to see women as "slower and less competent" than men were the main reasons for fewer women holding positions in the village as compared to men, apart from those held by the women's union' (p. 75).

The report found that the Women's Union was generally the most active among mass organizations that held periodical meetings for members or organized activities around various development program relating to family and economic matters. They also played an important role in disseminating information about laws, children's education, environment and family planning as well as providing training on gender equality issues.

In a number of ethnic minority areas, the WU had organized collective funds for their members. However, the mobilization of ethnic minority women to participate in community organization was hindered by limited education of community officials, the voluntary nature of the work and their involvement in their own family matters. Far fewer ethnic minority women attended meetings even when these were conducted in the evenings. Elsewhere, the higher percentage of women attending village meetings did not necessarily imply equivalent levels of participation: many attended because their husbands could not.

However, it became clear that the capacity of the Women's Union varied considerably at the local level. The number of meetings organized by the union varied considerably across hamlets. Regular and well-organized meetings could be of considerable benefit to women, particularly women from ethnic minority groups, who had fewer chances to meet with others to exchange information and experiences. The report noted that in while information on the Law for Gender Equality and the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention had been disseminated by WU staff and heads of hamlets, the women in the hamlets said that they either had no idea about these laws or just knew of their existence. WU members at the hamlet level did not yet know about these laws.

Promotion of women's grassroots participation through a variety of developmental activities thus appears to offer a promising way forward to build their capacity for public decision-making. This point is also supported by focus group interviews carried out by Jones and Van Anh found that women, even more strongly than men, identified increased their community participation as an important gain associated with the National Targeted Program for Poverty Reduction. Women were attending community and women's associations meetings more frequently than before: increased economic activity and participation in credit associations, taking on rotational leadership positions, had boosted their self confidence in the public domain and, according to the Deputy Director of the Women's Union, had led to women taking positions in local government at the village level and within the Women's Union. However, here too, there was the possibility was raised that women were only attending because men from their households could not attend. In addition, many women spoke of their hesitation about expressing their ideas for fear of being wrong.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Northern Mountains Poverty Reduction Project largely aimed at ethnic minority groups provides insights into the particular barriers faced by women from these groups. It suggested that there was some variation in participation. Women in the lowland areas of Tay, Muong and Thai groups appeared to be more active in hamlet meetings than those of the Hmong, Lao and Dzao groups. While this partly reflected the fact that men were away at work, it also reflected their enthusiasm to learn new skills. However, they remained diffident about expressing their views in front of a crowd, particularly when meetings were conducted in the official language and when commune leaders were not from their own ethnic groups.

The report found that participation in the first phase of the project had occurred on clearly gendered lines. Women participated primarily in meetings organized by the Women's Union or associated with family planning and population while men participated on a wider range of issues, including law, security, and agriculture/forestry extension. Men were registered as household heads and, in some mountainous communes, participated in meeting on behalf of women, giving the latter no opportunity to express their views in public. Women generally attended when male family members were absent or could not attend. The social isolation of these women cut them off from information channels and contributed to their lack of confidence. The report also noted the long hours of work, largely unpaid, undertaken by women in remote mountainous communes and extremely low levels of education were additional barriers.

The project report notes the expression of various stereotypical misconceptions about ethnic minority groups, and about women within them, by project and local government staff as well as WU cadres. It also notes expressions of inferiority and lack of self confidence expressed by women from ethnic minority groups: 'Many women lack self-confidence and cannot overcome it, they are very shy. When they talk with each other, they are not shy but when meeting a commune leader or head of a village, they get very shy and fear of speaking out' (WU staff member). One Thai woman said 'I am afraid of nothing but I cannot express my ideas' (p. 42).



## 4.6 The role of the Women's Union and civil society

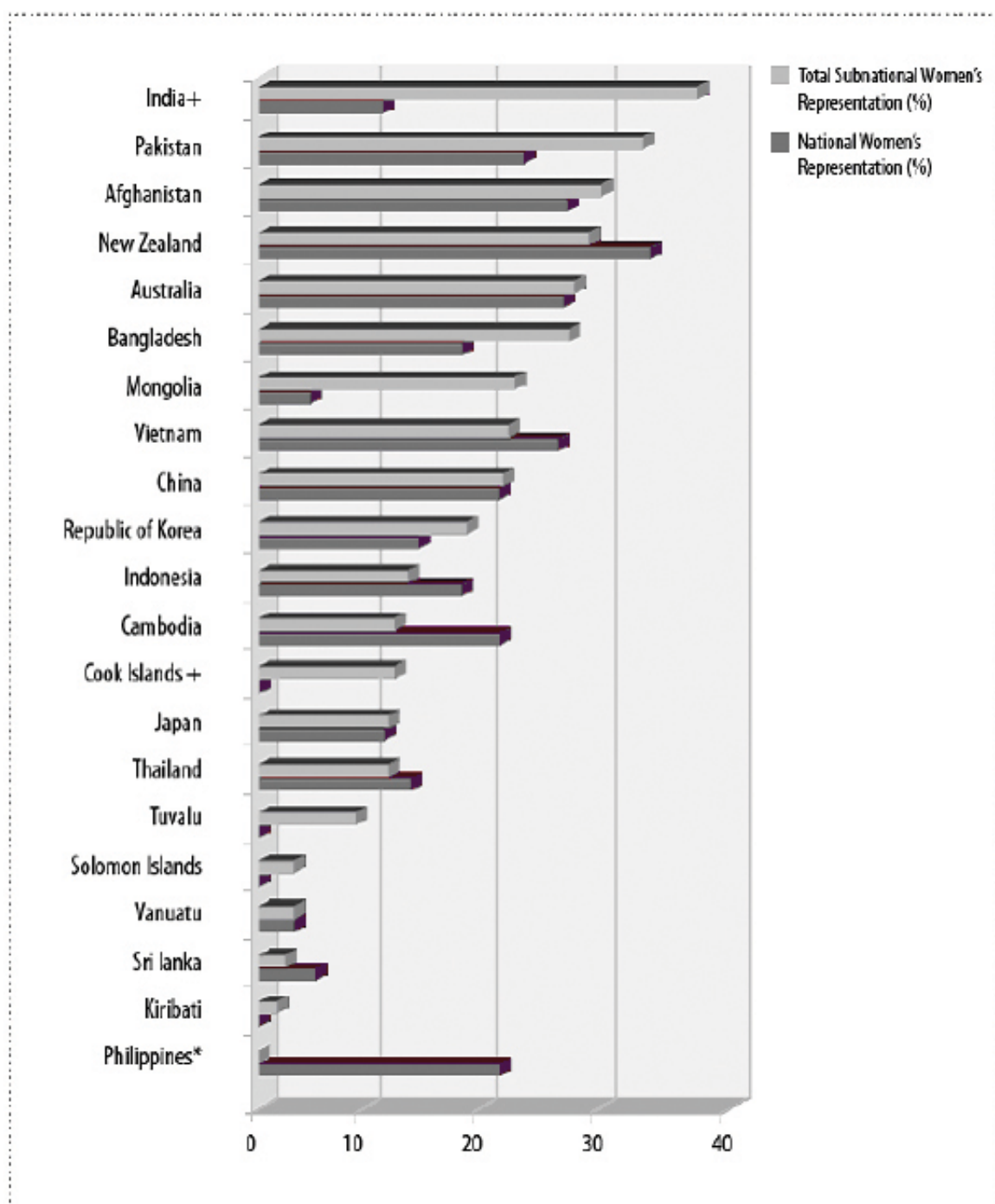
Viet Nam differs from many of the other countries in the region in its network of state-sponsored mass organizations to represent different interest groups within the population, including youth, workers, farmers and women. The Women's Union has created a vast network of members from the central to the grassroots level, around 13.6 million in June 2007. It has branches in every province and village of Viet Nam implements a wide variety of programs to support women's advancement, including health promotion, cultural and educational activities and a wide range of developmental interventions, including microcredit, training and access to technology in different livelihood domains. Women have to become members of the VWU to receive such support and there is special attention to the most economically disadvantaged.

The VWU thus represents an effective mobilizing force to advance gender equality goals at local and central levels. However, their capacity to do so does not match up to their numerical presence. One problem is the extent to which they seek to reproduce the traditional Confucian values and expectations around gender roles. The second is its close association with the official views of the state. As Schuler et al. observe, these expectations and the attitudes they fostered in WU members 'illustrate some of the unresolved contradictions in contemporary Vietnamese society's cultural construction of womanhood, in which concerns of gender equality and gender hierarchy are intermingled' (p. 391).

At third problem with the Women's Union is that its sheer size and presence makes it difficult for alternative forms of civil society organization aimed to promoting gender equality to flourish. The UNESCO study on the impact of tourism on gender relations among ethnic minorities cited in Chapter 3 noted that economic opportunities and the opening up of hitherto isolated areas has had a largely positive impact on the lives of many women from these communities but that these changes have failed to translate greater political participation. It blames this partly on the failure of the Women's Unions to promote such change: 'As long as the Women's Union and its representatives continue to espouse ethnocentric government views concerning ethnic minority gender relations, and if there are no alternative channels for women to increase their participation in communal matters, individual empowerment of Hmong, Dao and Giay women can hardly transform itself into social and political empowerment' (p. 46).

And as we noted earlier, the uneven levels of capacity of WU officials, particularly in ethnic minority areas, is another major constraint on its effectiveness. One of the goals of the 2nd Phase of the Northern Mountains project is precisely to strengthen the involvement of women and the local Women's Union in the development process. It sought to increase women's representation in decision making at village and commune level by ensuring that there was at least one woman recruited to represent each village on the Commune Development Board, that the head of the commune Women's Union would be the deputy head of the CDB and that the Women's Unions were actively involved in 'assisting with targeting and designing local social protection strategies'.

**Figure 4.1 -- Comparison of Women's Sub-national Political Representation as of October 2010**



**CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS****5.1 Conclusions**

Overall, significant progress has been made to close gender gaps in Viet Nam and, compared to its neighbors, the country is doing relatively well. The successes are many. Economic growth has been accompanied by major declines in poverty, and income poverty does not have a markedly gender dimension. Girls are attending school at equal rates to boys, and in fact outperform them on enrollment in tertiary education. Improvements in child and maternal mortality are remarkable, and health care provision is keeping up with the needs of the population. Even in geographically more remote areas where health outcomes are relatively lower, they are still very good compared to similar regions in other Asian countries. Women's employment is on the rise and rates of women's inclusion on LTCs has improved, albeit slowly. Representation in the National Assembly is high by regional standards although recently it has declined slightly.

Nevertheless, significant challenges remain, and tackling them may be more complex and nuanced than the challenges that preceded them. Addressing issues pertaining to the high SRB, the all too common instances of gender based violence, and the disproportionate time spent by women on unpaid work in the home, are all rooted in social norms and customs that cannot simply be legislated away, as important as laws are. Women remain seriously under-represented in leadership positions at all levels.

In terms of challenges with regard to the economy, this report has highlighted the persisting gender segmentation of the labor market. Women have been slower to move out of agriculture so that the agricultural labor force is becoming increasingly female. Within industry and services, they tend to be concentrated in particular sub-sectors and occupations. And across all sectors, they are over-represented in the informal end of the labor market, particularly in own account labor, unpaid family labor, and casual forms of wage labor. They therefore earn less, are less protected by labor law and have less direct access to formal social protection. Observed wage differences between men and women in Viet Nam do not appear to arise from gender differences in endowments, but from gender differences in returns to endowments. This is generally taken as evidence of discrimination. Women were also hit harder by the recent global economic crisis, shifting to more vulnerable work at a greater rate than men and seeing a halt in the previously declining gender wage gap.

The Vietnamese economy is changing rapidly, undergoing a transition from low to middle income. Simultaneously, it is becoming more connected to the global economy and the positive and negative shocks it generates. To the extent women are excluded from the formal economy, or face more limited work choices, they may be less able to benefit from these changes, and the economy may be less able to benefit from their productivity.

A fairly strong legal framework in support of gender equality is now in place in Viet Nam. The government has ratified a number of key international conventions which are relevant to the promotion of gender equality, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The 1992 Constitution of Viet Nam guarantees women equal rights in all spheres, including the family, and bans discrimination against women. There has subsequently been a raft of enabling legislation, including the Law on Gender Equality passed in 2006 and the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control. Gender equality has a central place in Viet Nam's efforts to achieve the MDGs.

A number of institutional arrangements, such as the GED in MOLISA, have been established to move the gender agenda forward. The Joint Program on Gender Equality has served as an important mechanism to help coordinate government and donor activity in this area. Moreover, the priorities listed in this report dovetail with the recommendations and structure of the LGE. However, as noted by the Government of Viet Nam in the NSGE itself, implementation has been slow. A coherent, well-funded, effort to achieve the admirable goals both implicit and explicit in the SEDP, NSGE, the LGE, and similar legislation is still lacking, as is a government-wide capacity to better understand gender issues and fashion and implement appropriate policy.

The challenge therefore is to put in place a series of concrete measures to ensure the enforcement of these commitments. This report makes a series of recommendations aimed at helping to keep Viet Nam moving along the path to gender equality.

An earlier version of this report had a longer list of recommendations, but a stakeholder workshop was held in Hanoi in August of 2011 for the purpose of selecting a few key cross-cutting priorities and a few priorities corresponding to the core chapters of the report. Participants were asked to read the report and then work together to put forward recommendations that had the highest priority, were practical, and could serve as a basis of partnership between stakeholders. The rest of this chapter focuses on the recommendations that emerged from those consultations.

While the recommendations coming out of this report relate to some of the specific areas in which action is needed, a number of recommendations cut across these different areas. Three such cross-cutting measures can be identified: taking concrete steps to ensure the implementation of the Law on Gender Equality; greater attention to the role of men and boys in advancing the gender equality agenda; and sex-disaggregated data on key issues.

### **Recommendation 1.1: Improve implementation of the Law on Gender Equality and the National Strategy on Gender Equality**

One important step in this direction is **building gender awareness and capacity within the relevant ministries**. The Government of Viet Nam should undertake training in gender analysis as specified, but as yet insufficiently funded, in the Law on Gender Equality. Sometimes the gender aspect of a

project is not obvious. Only sensitizing Ministries to the potential for “hidden” gender issues will allow them to better integrate gender into their work, as they deem appropriate.

More resources need to be devoted to implementing the Law on Gender Equality. The government needs to send a clear signal that implementation of the LGE is a priority. **Accountability needs to be increased.** This includes the development of a stronger monitoring and evaluation system to chart the progress of implementation and hold various agencies responsible for not meeting implementation targets. M&E reports should be widely disseminated to add to the sense of accountability.

### **Recommendation 1.2: Increase the involvement of men and boys when addressing gender issues.**

It is now widely recognised that men and boys have a critical role to play in the advancement of gender equality. Many barriers to equality stem from norms and attitudes that cut across gender, for example attitudes towards women’s leadership and responsibility for household chores. In addition, sometimes, as with certain health issues, males are at greater risk of negative outcomes. While this aspect of gender work is still relatively new in Viet Nam, there are examples of policy measures and interventions from other parts of the world that can provide lessons in shaping the country’s own response to this challenge. Engaging the mass organisations, such as the Farmers’ Union, the Youth Union and the Women’s Union, in promoting greater awareness around more general gender equality issues as well as specific issues, such as gender-based violence and HIV AIDS, where men’s attitudes and behaviour are directly implicated, appears to offer a promising means of achieving this.

### **Recommendation 1.3: Increase the quantity and quality of data research for monitoring and analyzing gender issues.**

Despite the increasing attention to gender issues within the policy domain, data on key gender issues continues to lag behind. The development of the National Gender Indicator System is an important step, and its implementation should be supported. This goes beyond sex disaggregation. Some data – like improved birth registration systems – are important for closely monitoring the SRB. Moreover, all survey instruments should be evaluated to make sure they not only have sex disaggregated data where appropriate, but consultations with gender experts should be undertaken to determine what other information could be key to various related gender issues. If indications of important gender differences emerge, then additional analytical work can be considered.

**More information is also needed on the interaction of gender and ethnicity.** Even with much attention focused on ethnic minority areas, gender gaps among various ethnic groups remain larger than among the majority population. Demonstration programs with associated impact evaluations are still needed to unlock the best strategies for helping this particular population.

In addition, **research is needed on culture and norms** and how they influence family and work decisions. This is generally lacking in Viet Nam. In order to craft better policies promoting equality of opportunity, more work is needed to be done to understand the societal forces that construct a



gendered workplace -- in particular, what is the process that goes into making decisions such as the selection of fields of study, occupation, and type of employment.

## 5.2 Gender poverty and well being

As the report clearly indicates, much progress has been made in regards to women's poverty, girls' enrollment in school, and women's health. Nevertheless, there are a few key areas where actions could address the remaining gaps and challenges that women face.

### **Recommendation 2.1: Revise education curricula and materials to better promote gender equality.**

Continued efforts are necessary to transform the content of educational materials and text books in order to break down gender stereotypes, encourage girls to enter various fields of study, address various aspects of sexuality and gender identity which contributes to gender-based violence, other forms of violation of women's human rights, and sex selected abortions. In addition, when designing these curricula it will be important to take into account cultural and language differences across different ethnic minority groups. As work has just begun on curricular development to be completed by 2015, this is a particularly opportune time to advise on its development, as well as provide supplemental materials.

### **Recommendation 2.2: Promote a comprehensive, cross-sectoral response to the problems of gender based violence.**

More needs to be done to ensure the implementation of the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control. Dealing with domestic violence will require a multi-sector approach within a nationally co-ordinated program. Actions should include:

- **A comprehensive health sector response.** Health care providers need to be trained to screen for GBV and provide services. Responses to GBV should be integrated into all areas of care such as emergency services, sexual and reproductive health services, mental health services and HIV/AIDs related services. Medical treatment should be complemented by counselling and referral services. Procedures and protocols should ensure confidentiality and safety of victims of violence. Violence related data collection, monitoring and reporting system should be integrated into greater Health management Information System. Health facilities should reach out to communities to raise awareness about services and support available.
- **Strengthen capacity of police and judicial system to implement GBV policies and legislation.** Legal aid officers, police and judges should be equipped with skills and knowledge about policies and legal frameworks about GBV, about providing gender-sensitive services to victims of violence and about dealing with perpetrators appropriately.

- **Strengthening political commitment and action** Interventions and activities at the local level should seek to engage community leaders and local authorities and mobilise their support. They can play a significant role in raising awareness about GBV issue and legal frameworks, challenging norms and stereotypes, providing counselling support, preventing violence through various interventions and handling perpetrators, but they need to be sensitized and provided with information about relevant policies and legal frameworks.
- **Promoting primary prevention.** There is a need to challenge the view that domestic violence against women and the violent discipline of children is normal. Primary prevention of domestic violence needs to challenge such views through programmes aimed at increasing public awareness and involving communities. Awareness of laws and measures are necessary at national and local levels. The draft Communication Strategy for the Family has a specific focus on domestic violence prevention. Many behavioural change communication activities and campaigns to promote gender equality and end violence have been initiated. Mass organisations such as Women’s Union, Farmers Union and Youth Union have started to integrate GE and GBV messages in some of their communications clubs at provincial and community levels. A five year national Joint Communication Campaign for Prevention of Domestic Violence was launched in 2008 to raise awareness among Vietnamese men and boys to promote their positive involvement in domestic violence prevention. These efforts should be strengthened, expanded and extended since awareness-raising and behavioural changes require long-term investment to be successful.
- **Involving men and boys.** Men can be peer agents of change and can help other men understand the impact of violence to their families and loved ones as well as to their own lives and well being. Media strategies that encourage men who are not violent to speak out against it and challenge its acceptability will help to counter notion that all men condone violence. Prevention efforts should include multi-media and other public awareness activities to challenge deeply held norms by both men and women about condoning and to reduce stigma and to promote discussion of impact of DV on children, family and society.

### 5.3 Gender, employment and livelihoods

The main gender issues raised in relation to the economy were less related to employment rates, since women in Viet Nam have high rates of economic activity relative to men, as well as to women in neighboring regions. Rather they were related to gender disparities in employment opportunities and the persisting gender segmentation of the labor market. Women tend to be concentrated in the informal economy to a greater extent than men, are more likely to be in vulnerable forms of work, to earn less and to be less well-protected by labor regulation and social security provision. There are two alternative but complementary approaches to improving the quality of employment: promoting the formalizing of employment and supporting those in informal employment. The recommendations in this chapter encompass both.

### **Recommendation 3.1: Increase training and incentives for women to enter a broader range of occupations.**

As the country moves into middle income status, women are likely to be at a particular disadvantage in gaining access to newly created jobs in higher-tech industries that demand workers with scientific, engineering and technical skills. Along with attempting to encourage girls to take up these topics, more efforts could also be made to use vocational training to increase productivity of both men and women in the face of changing labour market demands. Such efforts would benefit both formal and informal workers. Kabeer et al. (2005) pointed to the highly gender-stereotyped vocational training on offer in Viet Nam and its failure to prepare women to pursue a wider range of labour market opportunities. Public-private collaboration in the provision of training to young men and women, which brought training institutes into partnership with private sector firms have proved particularly successful in other countries in getting young women into the labour market. In addition, pro-active approaches – such as subsidies or awareness campaigns – could encourage women to enter non-traditional fields.

### **Recommendation 3.2: Address the double work burden through better infrastructure and policy supports**

One of the most persisting manifestations of gender inequality relate to the asymmetrical division of labour between paid and unpaid work within the home. Regardless of their employment status, women in Viet Nam (as in many other parts of the world) are responsible for the bulk of the household work and care of the family. This ‘time poverty’ does not simply curtail their choices in the labor market, it curtails their participation in public life more generally.

As the new UNRISD report suggests, responses to this problem can take three forms with different implications for different groups of men and women. Time-related measures seek to ease the conflict between the demands of work and home. Parental leave, including paternity leave, serve to both ease this conflict but also shift norms about child care responsibility. However, it is largely relevant to the formal sector and leaves out the vast majority of working men and women. In addition, time-related measures would have to be reformulated to take account of the need to care of the elderly.

Cash transfers, including child or family allowances and conditional cash transfers, have becoming increasingly prominent in the social protection. They have been found to promote levels of education and health among children. But for poor working women, the size of the transfers on offer are seldom large enough to offset the need for regular earnings and may simply entrench women in their care giving roles.

It is the third set of measures, namely investment in infrastructure and services that serve to lighten women’s domestic and care workloads, which hold out the greatest promise for the largest numbers of women. Investments in infrastructure, such as water, sanitation and electricity, and the provision of basic services in health and education, can significantly reduce the demands on women’s time as

well as the drudgery associated with some aspects of this work<sup>23</sup>. In addition, such investments – particularly in accessible and affordable care services – not only expand women’s ability to participate in the labor market but also in the public life of their communities more generally.

The last CGA called for work on assessing the value of unpaid work in the home, both to more accurately reflect national accounts but also to establish an economic argument for addressing this segment of the economy and for understanding the impact on this activity on women’s career development. This is still an unmet need.

## 5.4 Gender and political participation

Compared to its neighbors, Vietnam has a higher level of political participation. Nevertheless, women are underrepresented, and in the most recent elections there has been some slippage. Women still are underrepresented in non-governmental leadership positions, as well.

### **Recommendation 4.1: Equalize the mandatory retirement ages for women and men.**

Mandatory retirement at age 55 is a significant barrier to increased leadership of women in government position, both by making women leave the labor force but also by lessening the training they receive because of the anticipation of their early retirement. The recommendation, in line with CEDAW recommendations, is to have equal retirement ages for men and women.

### **Recommendation 4.2: Build the capacity for women’s empowerment and involvement in civic life**

This can be done through a variety of mechanisms, including increased training and development activities for women in government, and through more gender sensitive educational curricula. In addition, one of the most effective ways to empower women to take greater control over their own lives and to play a greater part in shaping the societies in which they live is to build their collective capabilities. A great deal of the failure to speak out against violence and abuse within the home or to exercise voice in communities reflects lack of self confidence and supportive networks. Promoting women’s participation in a variety of different kinds of organizations plays an important role in breaking down this isolation and providing them with the skills and self confidence they need to play an active role in the life of their community and within the political domain. Self managed groups, participation in the activities of the Women’s Union and other mass organizations and various official and non-official community groups all the possibility of building women’s associational resources. Group membership can also be used as an important means of building awareness about their rights among women and girls. Helping to build the capacity of these groups could greatly assist this process.

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<sup>23</sup> It is worth noting that the holding of seasonal fairs, saving women long journeys to the nearest market towns and construction of water supply infrastructure saving them the daily journey to the streams were noted in an Oxfam/Action Aid participatory poverty monitoring report as contributing to lessening women’s work burdens (2008/09)

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